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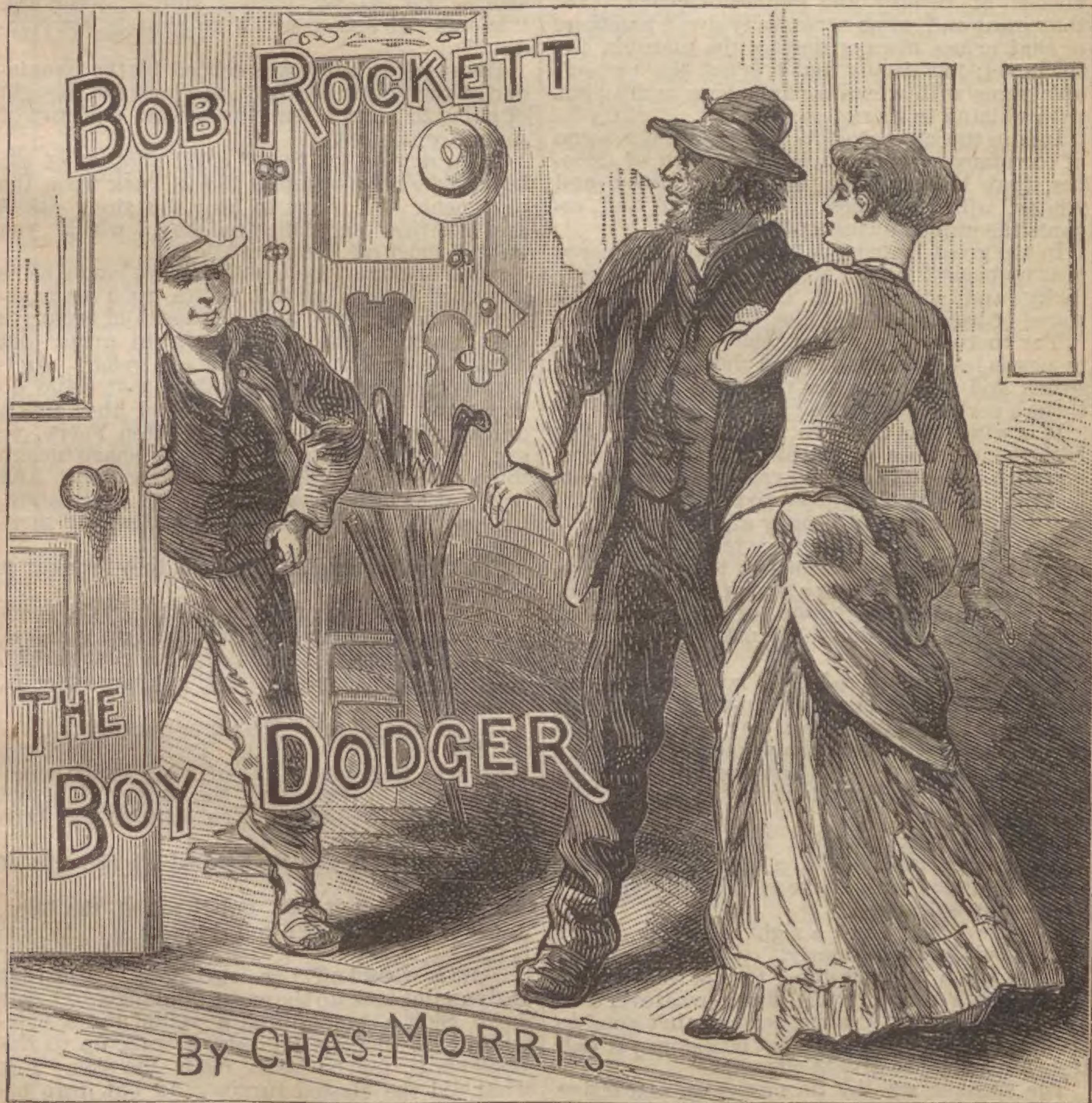
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WITH A VIOLENT START THEY TURNED, AND BEHELD BOB ROCKETT, WHO HAD ENTERED THROUGH
THE FRONT DOOR, WHICH HAD BEEN CARELESSLY LEFT ON A CRACK.

Bob Rockett,

THE BOY DODGER;

OR,
Mysteries of New York.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "WILL WILDFIRE," "BILLY BAGGAGE," "MIKE MERRY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY ROUGH.

We must ask the reader's indulgence if we are obliged to take him, in the following pages, into regions neither reputable nor savory; into abodes of penury and haunts of crime. Not that want and crime necessarily dwell together, or that crime always deserts the mansion for the hovel; but simply that it is not the respectable rogue with whom we have here to deal, but with villainy in its rudest form.

It is in the city of New York that the scene of our story is laid, and in the month of October, that halting-place between summer and winter, which partakes of the charm and escapes the unpleasantness of both.

In the great metropolis the tide of commerce is at its busiest flow. Men are making money easily and spending it freely, in a feverish round of legitimate and illegitimate pleasures.

Yet there are parts of the city in which money is less easily made and more grudgingly spent; and in which the pleasures are lower, though perhaps not more criminal in type.

It is with these that we are concerned. Not with the elegance of the aristocratic quarters, but with the squalor of the region of tenement-houses; not with the glitter and glare of wealth, but with the gloom of penury and want.

In front of one of these huge tenement-houses, in which humanity swarmed as thickly as bees swarm in their hives, on a warm October evening, was gathered a group of boys, most of them ragged, dirty-faced, ill-looking young vagrants.

The group comprised five boys, of various sizes, the eldest being a sharp-faced, dwarfish lad, who might have been of any age from fourteen to seventeen, and who seemed to domineer over the others with the authority of a born ruler. This was Bob Rockett, known as the Boy Dodger.

"Shet up that pertater trap of yourn, Joe Linker," he ejaculated, in a tone of command, "or I'll put on the air brake so sudden you won't know what's drapped."

"Supose a feller's got a right ter speak, hain't he?" asked Joe, rebelliously.

"Net when he arn't going to talk sense," was the Dodger's reply. "I'll stand whatever's in common sense, but I se the coon as ain't goin' to swaller talk soup. Ye can jist bottle up yer gab if ye ain't goin' to give it out solid."

The speaker was by no means an attractive specimen. His eyes were small and deep set, his nose a snub that had got an ugly cant to one side during some of his numerous fights, his lips

thick and sensual. His dirt-colored and tangled hair covered a head which had its greatest extension in the rear, showing a preponderance of the animal organs. Yet he was by no means dull looking. His small eyes glittered under their overhanging brows, and were full of a keen cunning that showed one well adapted to make his way through a wide-awake world. In figure he was squat and almost dwarfish, but his broad shoulders gave evidence of a strength that his form, at first sight, did not promise.

"Looke here, Bob Rockett," broke in another of the boys, a tall, solidly-built fellow, "there's no use in you squatting down on Joe that way. I don't see as you've bought his tongue. And you say about what you please yourself."

"'Cause I allers talks reason. Ye don't find me spinnin' out none o' that preacher stuff," answered the Dodger, with a sniff of contempt. "Wonder if Joe weren't to church last Sunday?"

His sneering laugh was echoed by the remainder of the young heathens, to whom the thought of going to church was the utmost evidence of mental weakness.

"Oh, dry up on that!" cried another of the boys, who was squatted like a Turk upon the pavement. "I want to hear the story about the Italian and the monkey, which you bu'sted short off in the middle."

"Oh!" resumed Bob, with a short laugh, as he stretched himself at full length upon the pavement; "he had jest the squeakiest old organ ye ever heered. He were tryin' to grind out 'Bully Boys,' but sich a gay old grind! Anyhow he had a cute little monkey, that could do 'most any thing 'cept talk. And ther was a crowd. It were down nigh Fulton Ferry, ye see. Well, that cute monkey was sharp 'nough to go feelin' in peoples' pockets fer money. And he'd just as lieve take a pocketbook as a penny, I s'pose. I know I would, if I was acting monkey."

The boys laughed at this, as if they thought it a good joke.

"Anyhow," resumed the speaker, "the monkey come over near me, and I held up a nickel, and then doused it down in my big coat-pocket. The sharp critter went squar' in there arter it, and—"

"And what?" came the eager question.

"He stayed," said the Dodger, laughing. "He was tied with a bit of rope, which somehow come in two; and the pocket flap shet down like a steel-trap. You oughter jest been there."

The boys were greatly amused at thought of his exploit.

"Did you git it off, Bob?" asked the boys, eagerly. "What did you do with it? Where is it?"

"Git a weasel off!" growled Bob. "But that Italian did kick up the wu'st fandango you ever see'd. Sich a dancin' and a yellin' and a hair-pullin'! I thought I'd take a walk up to the Boolevards, fer he 'most made me sick. But what did the blasted furriner do but drap his organ and make fur me, as if I weren't only a young gent out on a sociable? He grabbed me, and swore in his tarnal lingo that I had the

monkey. You never see'd an innocent lamb than I was when I axed him if his mammy knowed he was out. I was jist 'bout making that furriner go down on his shin-bones, and ax my pardon, fer I spread it on so thick that a good many thar took stock in me. I'd a-got off safe, too, only fer the dernedest sell anybody ever see'd."

"What was that, Bob?" cried the boys in chorus.

The young rough kept silent for a minute, as if he was reflecting on the uncertainty of fortune and the uselessness of virtue. Then he took up again the broken thread of his story.

"It were the monkey," he said.

"The monkey?"

"Yes. When I were busy axin' 'em what'd any fool want with a monkey when he hadn't no organ, and I were keepin' my hand kinder keerless on the pocket as bad the critter in it—what'd you think?"

"Oh, go on! Ye'r' too long-winded."

"Well, the fu'st thing I knowed, if there weren't that derned monkey a-squattin' on top my head, a-grinnin' to the folks, and a-rippin' my hat up as if he was special fond of old felt! Do ye know it was a blamed mean sitivation to be in."

"I should think so," came the laughing response. "How did he git there? And how did you git out of there?"

"Git thar? Hein? Why he eat a hole in my pocket big enough to put a loaf of bread in. As fer gittin' out, I was fearful 'fraid they'd grab me. So I jist snatched the monkey and flung him at the Italian's head. In course he let go me to git rid of the critter. Down I went, head foremost 'tween his legs, and sich a pilin' up of Italian and organ and monkey nobody never see'd. You bet I didn't wait to see 'em sorted out ag'in. I slid."

And the young Rockett laid back with a grave look upon his face, as if he had been reciting a perfectly reputable adventure. His companions laughed merrily at the narration, seeming to think it great fun.

The young street Arab who was thus enjoying the admiration of his young vagrant companions, had stretched himself out at full length across the narrow pavement, with little regard to the comfort of the passers-by.

But this state of affairs was not likely to continue. There now came along, with a slight reel in his gait, a weather-beaten, savage-faced fellow, without a coat, and his shirt sleeves rolled up to the elbows, while a short, grimy pipe was firmly gripped between his teeth.

He stopped on coming opposite the boy, and looked down with a dull glare in his eyes.

"Git out, ye bu'sted toad! or I'll kick ye out," he growled savagely.

"Like ter see ye try it on," Bob defiantly replied.

The rough-looking chap wasted no more words. In an instant he raised his heavy boot and gave a fierce kick, which might have broken a bone for the impudent boy, had he not quickly squirmed away from the impending disaster.

As it was the heel of the boot caught the Boy Dodger in flank, and rolled him over on the dusty pavement.

"Mebbe ye don't know me," growled the rongh. "Guess it's like ye will the next time."

"Bet I do, then, Rusty Mike. And I'll pay you yit fer that kick, sure's my name is Bob Rockett."

The fellow uttered a hoarse laugh, as he looked down upon his dwarfish antagonist. He walked on as if disdaining to have anything further to do with him.

"How the little banty does crow!" he said, replacing the short pipe between his teeth.

There was a lowering savagery in the look which the Boy Dodger cast after him, as he crawled slowly to his feet.

"Ther's ways of gittin' even," he grumbled, as he looked after his burly enemy. "'Cause a chap's a boy, that don't set him up fer a football— You laffing at me, hey? Bet I'll gl'n you suthin' to laff at!"

He turned and administered a fierce kick to Joe Linker, who had not dreamed of laughing. But the savage disposition of the young Arab had to seek revenge in some quarter, and this seemed the safest.

"Take that, ye durned little wharf rat, and git! Won't stand none o' yer grinnin' at me."

"I wasn't laughing," whimpered Joe.

"None o' yer slack now. Git's the word."

"Lookee here, Bob," interposed Paul Essex—the boy who had before taken Joe's part, "that's too thin. Joe hasn't done nothin' to you, and you ar'n't going to kick him as if he was a dead log. Not while I'm about, any way."

"You wantin' to take it up fer him?" asked the Dodger, savagely.

"I'm just the chap for that," and in an instant Paul was on his feet and had flung off his coat. "You little rat-tailed, snub-nosed bully! you won't be satisfied, then, till you get a rakin' down?"

"I don't keer no more for you nor a bumblebee 'd keer fer a moskeeter. If you 'spect you kin come in here and crow over us, yer jest crawlin' up the wrong tree. Squar' yerself, my purty jolly boat, fer I'm a-goin' to swamp yer."

With the quickness and ferocity of a cat the young reprobate sprung at his taller antagonist, his eyes blazing with a tigerish glitter as he struck with all his force at the face of his foe.

But Paul was not quite ignorant of the art of self-defense. He warded off the ferocious blows dealt at his face, giving a left-hander in return, that sent his assaulter staggering backward.

In an instant there was a desperate affray, the boys striking fiercely at each other's faces, or gripping and struggling with all the art of the wrestler, while blood began to streak their cheeks from the clawing blows they had dealt, and their comrades gathered in a ring around them, clapping and encouraging the young savages. This ring was quickly added to, people running in all directions, as if a fight was one of the choicest pleasures of the universe.

"Go it, litt'e one!" "Pile in, beanpole!" "Well hit! well hit!" "That's under the belt. Don't strike foul, Dodger!"

Such were some of the remarks that passed through the crowd, while not one of them thought of separating the combatants, whom the instinct of fight had aroused to fury.

They were well matched, despite Paul's great-

er size and weight; for Bob Rockett had the arms and shoulders of an athlete, and he was of that wiry strength and endurance which only shows itself at its best when the vigor of other men becomes worn out.

Paul, in fact, was displaying signs of exhaustion, while Bob, who had the worst of the fight at the start, was coming up with fresh energy to every round, the fierce look upon his face being replaced by a lowering smile that is far more to be dreaded than the fury of the savage.

"Well hit!" cried the crowd again, as Paul delivered a shoulder blow that was a square knock-down for his side.

"Up again and at it. The little chap has pluck. He will whip yet. Ten to one on him!"

"Done!" cried another.

"Hello! Scoot, fellers!" exclaimed one of their young companions. "Yere comes a peeler! Scoot, 'fore he grabs you!"

There was a sudden surge in the crowd, and a turning of heads to see the policeman who was rather leisurely approaching. At the same moment the boys scattered like the beads of a string which has suddenly broken: some into the open door of the tenement-house, others up a neighboring alley, till in ten seconds there remained only the observers, while the performers had entirely disappeared.

"What's wrong here? What does this mean?" demanded the policeman, as he hustled importantly into the crowd, club in hand. "What's the matter, I say?"

"The matter's all over, and run away," replied one of the auditors who had little awe of the dignitary. "There's nothing left but a few of the feathers."

"Break up this mob instanter, or I'll arrest the whole of you," was the haughty response.

With a laugh in its outer circles, the crowd dispersed.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

IN a contracted, dingy room, sparsely furnished with several tipsy chairs, a dilapidated lounge, and a table in which one lost leg was supplied by a box placed on end and surmounted by a brick, sat Rusty Mike, the savage customer who had just used his boot on the impudent boy.

He now occupied a chair drawn up to the table, and was devouring his supper of cold corned beef and dry bread with the avidity of a famished wolf.

There were two other occupants of the apartment. One was a tall, lank individual, dressed in a suit of rusty black, and with a quasi-respectability in his soiled cuffs and the attempted smartness of his collar and neck-tie. There was a sort of perpetual smirk on his face, a counterfeit presentment of good-humor covering the fox-like cunning of his eyes, and the dubious wrinkles about the corners of his wide mouth.

The other was a woman, a plump, comfortable-looking body, though with many lines of care in her once handsome face. She was dressed in a soiled calico gown, the bright figures of which had long disappeared under a coating of

grease and dirt. Nor was the remainder of her toilet any more attractive, her rumpled hair looking as if it had never made acquaintance with a comb.

"I hain't had one blessed mouthful since mornin' an' I'm as sharp-set as a hyena," announced Mike, as he continued his ravenous meal. "I say, Sal, what's been on the carpet? Old Smudge been round these diggin's, hey?"

"No," answered the woman, in a hoarse voice. "And maybe it's jist as well fer his beauty for I feel like taking his photograph on the bottom of a frying-pan, the old reprobate!"

"Now, that's not right, Mrs. Sally. You shouldn't never bear malice," chimed in the faded exquisite. "You don't give Mr. Smudge credit for his good p'ints."

"Mister Smudgel! Lord! ye'r' 'nough to make a hog sick." And Mike's face wore a look of disgust. "Tryin' to play yer airs on us, are ye?"

"I don't suppose it's no harm for a person to be perlite," answered Beau Bink, as he was called by his associates.

"What's adrift, Mike?" asked the woman, as if desirous to turn the conversation. "Any lay on foot?"

"Dry up, Sal," answered Mike, with a wonderful good-humor for him. "Don't be mixin' in men's bizness. Old Smudge ain't been here, then?"

"No."

"Then I've got to strike out fer him. Thor' mought be a bit o' work cut out. What lay on to-night, Beau?"

"Guess I'll step down to Wallack's. It's going to be a full house, and I've took a private box."

Mike laughed grimly.

"Look out it ain't a watch box."

He rose and walked to a closet, from which he took a long-skirted great-coat, with huge pockets. Putting on this garment, he drew several articles from a recess of the closet, which he dropped into the pockets.

"Tain't altogether as warm as new milk outside," he muttered. "If I'm late ye needn't wait up fer me, Sal. Only kick Beau out, fer he's too fond of toastin' his shins at the fire."

Lighting his pipe, and inserting its grimy stem between his teeth, the burly ruffian walked out of the room, flinging the door to after him with a thundering slam.

The two persons left behind looked meaningfully at each other.

"There's something in the wind," said Sal, with an expressive gesture.

Beau touched his lips with an airy grace.

"Mum's the word," he remarked. "I hope he won't get jugged; but, there's going to be a crib cracked afore morning. Anyhow, I'll have to step down and look arter my private box. It's 'most time to meet my wealthy friends and 'quaintances."

A strange look came upon the woman's face, when she was thus left alone in the room. She took the seat which Mike had just vacated, and sat for several minutes with her face resting upon her hands, as if lost in deep and unpleasant reflections.

Meanwhile the two men had walked away from the house in different directions, Mike passing the spot where he had, a half-hour before, so savagely assailed Bob Rockett, the impudent pavement lounger.

The group of boys was no longer there. They had not returned after their broken-up fight. Yet it is incumbent on us to follow the footsteps of a portion of the party, who are on business destined to prove of some interest.

It is, however, at a date some three or four hours later than that of the above incidents that we again find our youthful street rough, with three of his associates, but in a very different position from that in which we last left them. For they are now in a boat, and rowing slowly down the course of the East River, the Boy Dodger holding the tiller, while two of the others are engaged at the oars, and the third is perched as a lookout in the bow.

It was a moonless and starless night, the only light upon the dark surface of the stream being the reflected glow from the gas-lamps of the city and from the lights of the numerous vessels ranged along the wharves.

"Wouldn't Reddy Prime be ravin' if he knewed we'd salted the skiff?" remarked Bob, laughing. "If you'd only 'a' seen the neat style I slid the key from his vest pocket. Axed him fur a chaw, and while he were tellin' me to go to Greece, I clumb fur the key. And he thought I were only brushin' a fly off'n the end of his nose. What the blazes ails yer eyes, Jake Purdy? Want us to sink that schooner, eh? A purty lookout you are!"

With a sweep of the rudder the steersman saved the boat from collision with a schooner, that was gliding past under shortened sail. A voice came back in a laughing tone:

"Look out! There's a Cunarder below. Just try and don't stave in her sides."

"She'll have to keep outer our way, then," retorted the Dodger.

"She's right in here," announced one of the oarsmen, in a low tone. "The Three Sisters put in this arternoon with a cargo of prime saddle-rocks. Head her in, Bob."

"Keep yer weather eye open, Jake," warned the latter. "If the Harbors are about we mought catch thunder."

"And how about the oystermen?" asked the other oarsman.

"It's too 'arly for 'em to be on the watch. The'r all up to the shades, swiggin' beer. If we're cute we kin sell 'em fur a prime roast."

They were now approaching the line of the wharves, and the young river thieves began to row more cautiously, moving the oars with great care to avoid noise, while their tones sunk into whispers.

"Hist!" warned Jake. "There's a boat's nose peeping 'cross the Battery lights. Shouldn't wonder if it were the Harbors."

"Back water!" commanded the Boy Dodger. "Bring her to. Not a whisper, lads. They'll slide past 'thout ever seein' us!"

The long, black boat, rapidly propelled by a dozen stalwart arms, shot along the dark line of the piers, being visible to the boys against the background of lights, while they remained invisible in the outer darkness.

But to the chagrin of the young pirates the dusky boat suddenly shifted its course, and shot into the very dock where lay the oyster boat which they hoped to plunder.

"It's the Harbors, sure enough, blast 'em!" grumbled Bob. "If they catch us here they'll be axin' all sorts of ridik'lus questions. Guess we'd best put furder out, till they 'squatulate. Shouldn't wonder if its orsters they're arter, 's well as us."

Cautiously turning the boat it was rowed further out into the dark and silent stream, the shrewd judgment of the boys proving that this was no new adventure of theirs.

It was necessary to exercise some care to avoid the vessels that occasionally moved slowly by, and the boat was set further over toward the Brooklyn shore, out of the channel.

"S'pose we've got to lay here and rest for a half-hour, till them Harbors slides," remarked one of the boys, discontentedly. "Laws! it's enough to give a chap the shivers."

"Hold yer gab!" returned the Dodger. "Keep still as mice, lads. There's somethin' comin' this way under oars. Mebbe it's the Harbors ag'in. Hist! they're nearin' us."

The boys sunk into profound silence at this warning, but held their oars in readiness to row for safety, if necessary.

In the deep quiet that lay upon the stream the sound that Bob had heard became distinctly audible. The rise and fall of oars, handled with great care, and apparently muffled, came to their ears. There was no rattle in the rowlocks, but the successive splashes of water could not be mistaken.

"I've twigged 'em now," announced Jake, who had his eye to the water. "They're headin' straight for us."

"No, they aren't," whispered Bob, in return. "They'll pass a piece to the left. Here they come."

The dark line of the approaching boat now became visible to all. A vessel lay at anchor some distance away, with a light in her rigging. This light was directly behind the coming boat, and revealed its outlines in shadowy glimpses to the keen-eyed lads.

The mysterious stranger was now directly opposite, and some twenty feet distant from the skiff of the boys. To the surprise of the latter it suddenly backed oars, and came to a halt. This stoppage was followed by some conversation in a low tone, of which the listeners could distinguish no word.

"They've twigged us," whispered Jake. "We'd best git."

"No, no!" impatiently from the Dodger. "Keep still."

The next moment two dark forms were seen to stand erect in the opposite boat, while a horizontal outline was visible between them, as if they were lifting some weight from the bottom of the boat.

"Now," came in a voice raised somewhat louder. "A good send. One, two—and gone."

The object, flung with vigorous force, left their hands, and fell with a loud splash into the stream, some distance away from the boat.

"To arms and away," came again in hoarse tones.

As quickly as if they had been trained to that exercise the men seated themselves and grasped their oars, yet floating in the row-locks. The splash of the falling object had barely ceased ere their boat was again moving through the water. This haste indicated that there was something criminal in the mysterious action just witnessed by the unseen boys.

Whatever it was, Bob Rockett was as alert to discover as the others were to escape.

In an instant he ordered the boys to row; the sound of their oars being masked by those of the fugitive craft. The boat moved rapidly toward the eddy made by the sinking object.

But we must go somewhat back in our story to trace certain events leading up to this mysterious circumstance. A short time previous to the incident just narrated, beside an unoccupied wharf at no great distance from the Battery, there floated a boat containing one person, who seemed impatiently waiting as if for some expected companion.

"Drat him fur a slow-goin' mule," he muttered. "I'd give somethin' fine if I were safe out of this bizness, fer I don't like it fer nothin'. I'd slide, shoot me if I wouldn't, only fer Mike. But he'd brain me if I went back on him."

His soliloquy was interrupted by a sound which seemed to be that he was expecting, to judge by his quick movement. He drew the boat closer to the wharf, to which he clung in a crouching attitude, the high tide raising the water surface well toward the wharf level.

Yet the only sound audible was that of distant wheels, as if a carriage was being driven rapidly through some neighboring street. A minute or two afterward this sound came nearer, and was followed by the appearance of the carriage, drawn by two horses which emerged upon the street adjoining the wharf.

The horses were drawn up to a walk on reaching this position, the two men on the box apparently taking a cautious survey of their surroundings.

And now a low signal whistle came from the man in the boat.

"All correct!" answered one of the men on the box, as he sprung hastily to the ground. "Fetch yer kerrige in this way, and quick as powder. This is the skittish part of the game."

He hurried across to the locality of the boat.

"The coast clear?" he impatiently asked.

"Ay! ay! Hurry, Mike. It'd be tarnal awkward to git nabbed now."

"Burn yer bu'sted tongue, ye hain't got no more nerve nor a cabbage," came the answer, in tones which could only be those of Rusty Mike. "Fetch yer bosses round this-a-way. And quick, d'ye hear?"

The carriage was now drawn up to the side of the wharf opposite the boat. The coachman continued on his seat, looking directly forward, as if anxious not to know what was taking place beneath him. But Mike had been quick to throw open the door of the vehicle, displaying within a shadowy form, which seemed that of a woman, and at her feet a long, slender package, inclosed in some dark material.

Mike grasped this object in his vigorous arms

and drew it from the carriage, assisted in some measure by its occupant.

This person now leaned forward, displaying in the faint light the rounded outlines of a woman's face. Young and handsome so far as could be made out.

"Haste, now," she uttered in a musical hiss. "Do not fail and your reward shall be doubled."

"That's all right," growled Mike. "And ther's no time now fer talk. Snatch it, Tim."

He hastily lowered his burden to the man in the boat, who staggered with its weight as he disposed it lengthwise on the bottom.

Mike hastily closed the door of the carriage.

"Off with ye, like lightnin'," he called to the coachman as he himself sprung into the boat.

In another minute the vehicle was rolling away citywards, while the boat moved out into the stream, impelled by two pairs of oars.

We need not follow them in this movement. We have already seen the end of their mysterious journey, and the effort of the curious boys to discover the nature of the object thus strangely consigned to the swift flood of the river.

CHAPTER III.

A VISIT, AND A DISCOVERY.

It is a most attractive interior. Crimson draperies, depending from the windows, in massive folds, let the sunlight strain in rich hued mistiness through their dense thickness, and throw an alluring gloom over the velvet-clad chairs and the rich shades of walls and carpet. Oil paintings, in warm tones, adorn the walls of the small but elegantly furnished apartment. A bronze vase, filled with a fresh bouquet of fragrant flowers, stands by the mantle. Everything in fact is rich, brilliant, and in excellent keeping.

On a sofa so placed that the subdued light from one window falls fully upon it, reclines a young lady, in the bloom of youth and beauty. She is dressed in keeping with the room she occupies, the purple folds of her attire falling in negligent waves to the floor, while her face, as she listlessly turns the pages of a book, is flushed with the warm crimson of the curtained light.

Yet her reading is only a pretense. Her eyes are not even fixed upon the book. Nor does she seem quite at ease, for she starts lightly at every sound from without, her eyes turning with repressed impatience to the door. To all appearance she is expecting a visit.

There is a rap, quick and somewhat loud, at the door of the room.

"Come in," she says, in the tones of a musical voice, as her eyes become centered upon the pages of her book.

In response to this invitation the door opened and a gentleman entered, a tall, shapely, handsome young man, though with a hasty step, and a look of disquiet in his fine brown eyes.

The lady lifted her eyes negligently from the book, and turned her face, with its sunlight flush, toward him.

"Ah! Mr. Delorme. Why, what an abnormally early visit for you. I did not know that you kept such unfashionable hours. But I am glad to see you, for I am growing tired of this stupid book. Pray be seated."

She let the book fall carelessly to the floor as she spoke, and turned her face toward him, without rising from her half-reclining position on the sofa.

"Early!" he said, with a slightly distracted manner, supporting his gloved hand on the back of a chair. "But—but, Miss Ormiston, there has been the most extraordinary affair.—You were at Miss Garland's yesterday?"

"Oh yes! I spent the afternoon with Grace. Poor soul! I suppose you heard of her sad misfortune?"

"Misfortune! It is the most unexplained mystery!" His voice had a ring of distress. "What can it mean? What can have become of her?"

"Why, sir, I do not understand you," and the young lady quickly rose to a sitting position. "Have they not told you the cause of her sudden absence? The death of her father—her hasty journey—"

"But her father is *not* dead!"

"Not dead!" Miss Ormiston rose to her feet, and confronted him in wide-eyed surprise. "How can that be? I saw the telegram. I helped Grace in her hasty packing. I accompanied her to the depot.—Not dead? But you have not been to the house, nor heard the news?"

Her bright eyes were full of feeling for his evident distress as she thus spoke.

"Yes; I know it all!" His fingers closed firmly on the chair. "But I have telegraphed West for the particulars, and have received a reply from Mr. Garland himself. He is perfectly well. There was no such dispatch sent. There is some strange mystery here."

"Good heavens! you do not tell me that?" exclaimed the young lady, laying her hands upon his arm, and looking up earnestly into his face. "But the message came. She took the Erie train West. I saw her on board the cars myself.—Not dead? Then what can it mean? Oh, Mr. Delorme! can there be anything wrong in this? Had you not better pursue her at once? Some enemy—some base villain—"

"Yes," he said, quickly, wiping a cold sweat from his brow. "I merely wished to learn from you if she had really gone. I shall follow at once. And if I find—"

He paused suddenly; took his hat from the table, and with a nervous step walked to the door of the apartment.

"Excuse my haste," he said, turning toward her. "But—you will understand—"

"Certainly—certainly," she eagerly replied, extending her beautiful arms as if she would push him from the room. "Haste! haste! Let nothing delay you. And send me word of what you discover. I shall be in agony until I hear from you."

The door closed behind him. She could hear his departing steps upon the stairs.—Then the look of anxiety left her face and a smile of deep meaning took its place.

"Yes, yes; pursue her, George Delorme," she murmured. "Save her from her foes—if you can.—But you shall not save yourself from me. Ah! I love you! and none shall stand between me and my love!"

There was a look upon her flushed face, as she

stood there, with extended arms, that had in it a vast depth of passion. There was far more in that woman than the listless novel reader she had appeared but a short time before.

She walked quickly to the window, flung aside the heavy curtain with a sweep of her arm, and looked earnestly out upon the street, following with burning eyes his departing form.

"Pursue her: yes," came in murmured accents from her lips. "You have pursued her too long. Poor thing, you have pursued her to her misfortune. And now—"

She dropped the curtain and moved hastily across the room, stopping in front of a tall pier-glass that revealed all the rounded curves of her form, and the beautiful outlines of her face.

"You can not say that I am not beautiful," she continued, a smile of gratification lighting up the full features, with all their physical charm. "And you shall be mine, cold as you have been to me.—I swear it!"

But we must return to the boat-load of adventurous boys, whom we left at rest in the darkness on the waters of the East river. The mysterious boat, which they had so eagerly watched, had not got many feet distant ere a second splash followed that of the strange object which had been flung into the stream.

"What is that?" cried Mike, resting an instant on his oars.

"Oh, nothing!" replied his uneasy companion. "A porpoise jumping, I s'pose. Fall to. I don't want to hang about here."

"Devil take you fer a white-livered cur!" growled Mike. "Ye'r a neat coon for men's bizness. Why ye ain't got a soul as big as a half-grown wafer. A-shiverin' at every noise as if it were the click o' the darbies!"

Mike had taken again to the oars as he uttered in a subdued growl this unflattering opinion of his associate.

The other made no reply, but continued to use the oars with all his strength.

Yet it was no porpoise which had made the alarming splash. It was no other form, in fact, than that of Bob Rockett, who had leaped from the approaching boat into the water, in pursuit of the sinking mass.

The boy was a perfect water-rat, and almost as much at home in the waves as on shore. His aim was as quick and sure as that of the South Sea Islanders who dive for coins, and catch them ere they reach the bottom.

The boys in the boat watched with earnest eyes for the reappearance of their companion.

That half-minute, which seems so like a half-hour under such circumstances, passed, and the swimmer's shaggy head emerged from the water at but a short distance from the boat.

"What luck?" asked Jake Purdy, stretching out his arm toward him.

"Hush!" was the cautious response. "Is the coast clear?"

"Yes."

"It's nabbed, then. Stand by to heave it aboard," and he drew above the water a portion of a shapeless package.

Jake had by this time grasped Bob by the shoulder, and drew him in toward the boat. The

active lad threw one hand over the gunwale, and pulled his prize within reach of the other boys, who had shipped their oars, and were eagerly waiting to help him on board with the strange object.

"I hope it ain't no dorg, nor sich chaff, as them chaps was tryin' to drown," remarked the Dodger, as he brought the bag-like material within their reach. "It wouldn't be no fun if we'd a-given up our orsters fur sich truck—Belay, chaps, do yer want to capsize the skiff? Hold yer level till I get to the other side. I'll ballast her."

The boys clung to the recovered object while Bob dived under the boat. Reappearing in an instant, he grasped the opposite gunwale, holding the boat steady.

"Now, jerk her in lively!" he cried. "I've got the craft trimmed."

The weight seemed very heavy when drawn from the water, and the three boys could scarcely have got it in, only that the boat careened to the water's edge despite Bob's balancing weight, and the prize was rather shuffled than lifted over the gunwale.

"Good for our side!" exclaimed the swimmer, as he lifted himself from the stream, and sprung with an alert movement into the boat.

"Now the question is, what's the plunder?" he remarked.

It was still dark, but they had drifted nearer to the anchored vessel, whose light threw a faint glimmer upon the water, enabling them to perceive that it was a long, slender package, enveloped in some sort of thick cloth.

"Do you know," said Jake, in a thrilling whisper. "I do b'lieve it's a livin' creetur. I felt somethin' jist like an arm through the stuff."

"And this looks like a head," said one of the other boys, pointing to a rounded extremity of the package which rested upon one of the seats of the boat.

"Lend me yer knife, Phil," said the Dodger. "Ther's no use guessin' when we kin dig in and find out."

Opening the keen blade of the knife in an instant the boy ripped the firm covering, for a length of several feet, throwing back the edges of the cut stuff, and revealing a head-shaped object whose character it was too dark to perceive.

"It's a face!" announced Bob, as he ran his fingers over the dark mass. "And a woman's, sure as shootin'! Wouldn't I give somethin' now fer a match!"

"I've got one," remarked Phil.

In a moment the match was struck. For an instant it smoldered, and then burst into a bright flame, while the boys' faces were bent eagerly forward over their mysterious prize.

What was their surprise to see break out into sudden luster, under the gleam of the match, a face more beautiful than any one they had ever before observed.

A face of perfect outline, instinct with all the charm of youth, a dense mass of brown hair clinging to the rounded cheek, while the eyes were closed as if in sleep or death, and the skin was of a marble whiteness, as if every drop of blood had flown back upon the heart.

For a single instant the burning match revealed this marvelous vision of youth and beauty, and then went out.

The boys drew a long breath.

"Jerusha!" cried the Dodger; "I never see'd sich a face! We've got to bring her to life or bu'st, boys, fer ther's cash in this. Did ye see the di'monds a-shinin' on her neck? Tell ye what, boys, it's a ten strike if we kin fotch her to."

CHAPTER IV.

OLD SMUDGE.

Our last chapter opened with the description of "an interior." This chapter must commence in the same manner, but the locality, the conditions and the occupant so different from those of Miss Ormiston's boudoir that they might well have belonged to a different world.

It is in the meanest, most densely populated, and most disreputable portion of the city, that we find a large, old-fashioned edifice, evidently once a building of some note, and still preserving an aspect of dignity in the midst of the meaner edifices by which it is surrounded.

The front room on the second floor of this building, is a large, square apartment, wainscoted in some dark, foreign wood, and the ceiling adorned with arabesque designs in plaster, but the former so concealed with dirt, and the latter with cobwebs that it is quite impossible to make out their original character.

The room might pass for a second-hand shop of odds and ends, since a great variety of objects hang upon the walls or incumber the floor, some of them curious and valuable, others hardly worth lifting from the gutter, whence they seem to have come.

A large table in the center of the apartment is heaped with such objects, ranging in value from a broken shoe-buckle to a damascened sword-blade; from a torn handkerchief to a scarf of embroidered silk; all mingled together with little regard to their value or security.

By the wall near the window stands an old desk, and before this, in a rickety chair, sits the presiding genius of the place, a man of so peculiar aspect as to merit a special description.

In general outline he resembled more an overgrown spider than any human prototype, his body having the same puffed, unhealthy look, while his arms and legs are long, thin and crooked, and his fingers, with their unsightly nails, remind one of the talons of a bird of prey.

The face of this man was adorned with a long, hooked nose; a wide mouth, the upper lip drawn back and revealing some discolored snags of teeth; small, foxy eyes; and a wrinkled skin, that looked more like soiled leather than the covering to a human face.

He was dressed in an old coat, which had once been gray, but which now displayed a wide variety of dusky shades, and which hung to his heels in a most depressing lack of stiffness. His head was covered by a soiled handkerchief, knotted at the four corners, which formed his favorite indoor head-dress.

Such was old Smudge, by which euphonious name the occupant of the ancient Rensselaer

house was usually known. As to his business was it not the sale of second-hand curiosities and valuables of every description? though some of the neighbors did not hesitate to say that the old fellow had other irons in the fire than appeared on the surface.

The old chap did not occupy the whole of the rambling edifice; but as it was his property, it is likely that he was very careful as to the character and social position of his under tenants, since he prided himself on his respectability.

But we, in our office as reporters, are able to penetrate more deeply into the secrets of this ancient domicile, and to discover some of the mysteries connected with old Smudge's mode of doing business.

It was the morning after the events narrated in our last chapter. The old fellow was seated at his desk busily engaged in making some entries in an account book.

Suddenly there came a peculiar knock at a door leading from the room into a rear apartment. Old Smudge quickly raised his head and fixed his small eyes on the door in question. A square of glass, an inch or two in width, occupied a portion of it; rather too small to give light, but quite large enough for the purposes of observation.

Pushing back his account book the old fellow rose and shuffled his loose slippers across the floor, as he picked his way back through his obstructing valuables.

"Who ish dat so quick dis morning?" he asked himself, in a tone that had in it a rasping hoarseness.

Opening the rear door he entered a smaller apartment, almost bare of furniture, yet containing some of the over-abundance of his stock in trade.

Before him, in an attitude of affected grace, stood Beau Bink, the faded exquisite.

"Mornin', Mr. Smudge," greeted the latter, with an easy wave of the hand. "How remarkably well you are looking."

"Am I?" snapped the old man. "Ish dat bishness? What you wants, hey?"

"Nothing, nothing," answered Beau, languidly. "Only I've got a few handkerchiefs, of fresh importation. I thought you'd mebbe like to look at the line of goods."

"Le' me she 'em," answered Smudge, extending his claw-like hand.

Beau drew from his pocket several handkerchiefs.

"I have had them imported myself, so I know they're first chop," he said, as he placed them in the extended claws.

"I sphose," examining them with an experienced eye and touch. "Anyting elshe?"

"Well, a trifle of a scarf, that somehow got mixed up with them."

He drew from the same pocket a lady's silk scarf.

"Pish!" exclaimed the old man, as he ran his fingers over it. "Not goot. None dese t'ings stolen, hey?"

"What do you take me for?" asked Beau, with a show of indignation. "Do I look like a man that's not on the square?"

"Dey ain't wort' much," answered Smudge,

paying no attention to this protest. "Dat kind goots ish out o' fashion."

"That's a lie, old man. I saw folks wearing just sich scarfs so later ago nor last night; and up at Wallack's too. That's a fashionable audience, for I paternizes that establishment myself."

A step was heard upon the stairs. The old man quickly crushed the articles under a heap of curtain stuff that lay near him, and pushed Beau by the shoulders into the front room.

"Wait dere," he said. "An don't shtear not'ing from de ole man, fer you know he ish ferrry poor."

With a grating laugh he turned to face the new-comer. What was his surprise to see a half-grown boy, of stout but dwarfish figure, enter the room.

"Hey! what you want yere?" asked Smudge, in angry tones. "You git out yere now, poy, 'for I set de dogs on ye."

"Rayther guess not," answered the boy saucily, as he seated himself in a creaking chair. "If yer dorgs come here I'll bu'st the'r b'ilers so thunderin' quick, that ye'll think ther's an earthquake got loose."

"What you want, bey?"

"Now that's biz. I'm a wide-awake, I am. My name's Bob Rockett, you're old Smudge, the fence—"

"It ish a lie! It ish a lie!" and he grasped the impudent boy with both hands by the shoulders and rocked him violently back on the chair, while a demoniac expression came upon his ill-favored face. "You little fool! You come yere for chaff, hey? I gif you chaff!"

But his fury was suddenly changed. He released the boy, and retreated a little with a staggering step.

"Mine Gott!" he exclaimed, holding up his hands. "A poy like dat, too!"

This sudden change was caused by a movement of the boy's band, which threw a sparkling flash of light into the old man's eyes.

"That's nothin'," said the Dodger carelessly. "It's only one of the fam'ly diamonds that I want to raise the wind on."

"You waits yere; one minute."

Old Smudge hurried into the front apartment, where he quickly dismissed his former customer, after paying him for his articles. He bolted the door after him as he went down-stairs. A single glance had taught his experienced eyes that the diamond was a valuable one, and he wanted no interruption.

"Le'me she," he said, on returning.

The large stone that sparkled so brilliantly in the sunlight occupied the center of a golden breastpin. He turned and examined it on all sides with the skill of a connoisseur.

"Pooh! not'ing but pastel!" he growled. "Goot gold, dough. Where you git him?"

"That's my business," retorted Bob. "And I don't want no taffy, neither. That ther di'mond is been in the Rockett family ever since old Noah crossed the frog-pond on a raft. It's fu'st chop, I tell yer. It's wu'th a cool thousand, if it's wu'th a cent."

"T'ousand tevils!" ejaculated old Smudge. "I gif you five tollars for it. Dat pay for de gold, De stone is wort' not'ing."

"All right," retorted the shrewd boy, with a comical wink. "You kin have the gold for five dollars. I'll keep the stone, bein's you don't want it."

The old rogue was slightly taken aback.

"Where you git him?" he asked again.

"Ain't I told yer? Pass her over, old Smudge. Di'monds ain't in your line. I know the chap as 'll shell out lively fer that beauty."

The boy snatched the jewel from the claws that held it, and walked with a swaggering gait to the door.

"Oh, come yere now, my purty little chap," cried old Smudge in wheedling tones. "Le' the ole man she de nice t'ing again. Mebbe I gif you more."

Bob turned back with an expression of impudent shrewdness upon his face, in which the lines of youth were hardened into the experience of age.

But we will not pursue the details of this bargaining. It will suffice to say that the shrewd boy left old Smudge's den a half-hour afterward with the weight of twenty dollars in his pocket, a sum which seemed a fortune to him, though it was not a fifth of the value of the jewel which had fallen into the old receiver's possession.

But we may safely repeat Old Smudge's question. Where did Bob Rockett get the diamond breast-pin? In order to answer it we are drawn back again to the events of the previous night.

We have seen how the boys had cut the canvas covering of their strange prize, revealing a marvelously beautiful face by the momentary light of a match.

It was an exciting situation. Was the woman dead? If not how should they revive her? If so, what should they do with her? It was a dilemma to puzzle older heads than those of a group of vagrant boys.

"I don't believe she's drowned, nohow," announced the Dodger. "Why the stuff ain't much more nor wet on the inside. It's mighty close, and the water hadn't much time to get through it.—And what's more, ther's a sort o' warm feel 'bout the gal's cheek. Wonder if they giv her some sort o' pizen stuff to put her to sleep till they could drown her?"

A consultation was held over the seeming corpse, which ended in Bob's suggestion being adopted. She could not have swallowed any water, or not sufficient to injure her. There was evidence of life in the warmth of her face.

"We must get back to the wharves," said the Dodger. "Got another match, Phil?"

"Yes."

"S'pose we take another peep, then. Lawsee, such a face as that was!"

The flaming match again revealed the charming young face to the admiring eyes of the boys. But a change had taken place since they last saw it. Its marble whiteness was being replaced by a faint pink flush, which had already tinged the lips, and was slowly growing on the cheeks.

"Why, you said there was a di'mond on her neck, Bob," remarked Phil. "I don't see none."

"Mebbe it was only a drop o' water," was replied indifferently. "Looks like a di'mond sometimes, ye know."

Phil looked suspiciously at Bob, but said nothing. He seemed to have his doubts about that explanation.

After a further consultation they moved the insensible figure further aft, with a coat under her head for a pillow, and the boys took to their oars again, directing their course toward the New York wharves.

"Don't see what we're to do with the gal," confessed the Dodger, after they had proceeded some distance. "If she were only dead, we mought send for the cor'ner; and if she were alive, she could look out fer herself. But when a gal's half-alive and half-dead, she's awkward to handle."

A slight stir, as if in answer to his words, took place in the bottom of the boat. It was followed by a deep sigh.

"Where am I?" came in a faint, but very musical voice.

"Good fer our side. She's cum to!" cried Bob, with a burst of satisfaction. "Ye'r' all right, ma'am. Ye'r' jist layin' in the bottom of a boat, away out in the East River. But ye ain't drownded yit, so you needn't be skeered."

A slight cry of alarm followed.

"In a boat! On the river! Oh! what can it mean! How came I here?"

"That's what nobody knows, 'cept them that put you here," answered Phil. "Some devils were trying their prettiest to drown you, ma'am. But we boys happened to be around, and we pulled you out."

Another faint cry. The woman seemed thoroughly alarmed and astounded. She made an effort to rise.

"Now jest ye keep still!" cried Bob, authoritatively. "Ye'll upset the boat next, and then we'll all go to kingdom come; 'cept them as kin swim. Jist say whar you wants us to take ye, ma'am, and we're yer horses."

"You saved me from the river? Some one was seeking to drown me?" This was in a faint tone of bewildered questioning.

"That's hittin' right squar' on the head of the nail," replied the Dodger.

The lady lay silent for some time, while the boat continued to progress toward the wharves.

"I cannot imagine," she at length said, as if soliloquizing, "who could wish to destroy me. If I return home I may still remain in ignorance, and be exposed to new efforts. If they seem to have succeeded, they may reveal themselves by their actions.—If I can only remain concealed for a time! Boys, I have to thank you for my life. Can you help me further in finding shelter? I am wealthy. You shall not regret it."

"Yes, 'um," returned Bob, heartily. "We're just the boys fer that."

"Ther's money in it," he said to himself, as the boat grazed against the wharf.

CHAPTER V.

MAKING A NIGHT OF IT.

"JIST foller me, chapees, if ye'r' on it fer a snoozer," exclaimed Bob, as he led the way up one of the narrow streets of the lower city. "I've got lots of cash, I have. I'm the premium boy millionaire. Ef ye'r' on it, say the word, and we'll make a night of it."

His companions were his friends of the preceding night's expedition, Jake Purdy and Phil Fooths, two fit associates for Bob, for they were as wicked by instinct and as depraved by education as only the offscourings of a great modern city could be.

Phil, a shrewd and suspicious young rogue, listened with some distrust to his companion's boast.

"Where did you run foul of a gold mine so sudden?" he asked.

"I don't know as that's none of your affairs," answered Bob, defiantly.

"I calklate it am, then. Mine and Jake's too. Who grabbed the di'mond off that woman's neck last night, eh?"

Jake, who had listened in silence, stopped and looked at Bob with a sudden suspicion. But the latter was in no sense disconcerted.

"Looke here, Phil," he said, with a defiant gesture. "You hinted som'at of that sort last night, and I let it slide, 'cause I took pity on yer ignorance. This is the second time now, and I wants to know if it's fight ye mean!"

Clinching his fists he bristled up like a game cock in front of the latter but slighter boy.

"You know that I ain't on the fight with you," replied Phil, with some trepidation.

"Cause I'm b'ilin' fer a mill with any coon as hints that I ain't on the square. What you got to say, Jake Purdy?"

"I ain't said nothin'," replied Jake.

"Then I wants you both to understand that this time slides, but the third time means fight. It's my own biz whar I gits my dingbats, and I'm goin' to smash any boy's nose as says it ain't. Got all that down in yer bread-baskets?"

"Yes,"

"Then we're lively coons ag'in. What you say now? Are you in fur a night of it?"

"You bet we are!"

"Then let's sail in. I'm a moneyed corporation, and I'm straight on't fer a lark. Let's take in the Blue Bell Varieties. It's a boss show."

This proposition was unanimously carried, and the group of youthful reprobates, on their road to ruin, hurried with delight toward the station on the down-grade to destruction which their leader had just named.

A short time afterward saw the three boys installed in what was called a private box in the Blue Bell Varieties. But we must be excused from describing its crimson hangings and its silken upholstery, for it had no more of either than has a horse-stable. Faded and tawdry curtains hanging in front formed the only effort at adornment, the box itself being of the plainest carpentry, and furnished only with some hard wooden chairs.

Yet it was superior to the rest of the establishment. The Varieties in fact, occupied the basement portion of an edifice, or rather the cellar, being a long underground apartment, with rough, whitewashed walls and cemented floor. The seats consisted of rows of benches, without backs; and the stage of a narrow elevated platform, curtained off at one side for a dressing room; the whole affair as rude and primitive as could well be imagined.

As for the audience it was in good keeping

with the establishment. Such a crew of beggarly, evil-faced tatterdemalions, coatless, ragged, bristling with half-cropped beards, and bloated with bad whisky, it would have been difficult to find elsewhere."

Yet mixed with these canaille were some better dressed auditors, fast young men, out on a lark, and anxious to see all the dep hs of theatrical degradation; yet apparently with enough self-respect left to be ashamed of their surroundings.

And the smell was as bad as the sight. The smoke from bad tobacco rose in a cloud. The fumes of bad liquor filled the room as busy waiters answered to the calls of the thirsty audience.

It was indeed a delectable establishment.

As for the performance it was in keeping with the audience. Loose songs and looser dances constituted its principal points. There were burnt-cork minstrels, clog-dancers, and ballad-singers; but the most loudly applauded of the performers were the so-called comic singers and ballet-dancers.

Such was the Blue Bell Varieties.

"See yere, fellers," said Bob slyly, as he drew a small flask from his pocket. "I s'pose they won't sell us no old ryo, 'cause we're boys. But I come pervised."

As he spoke he took a draught of the burning liquor, with as much ease as if he had been brought up on whisky. The other boys were not his equals in this respect, and choked and coughed in a strangling manner as the fiery liquid scorched their throats.

"Gay old topers, you are," laughed Bob in derision. "Chokin' over prime bourbon as if it was reg'lar kill-devil.—Hi! hi! that's good! D'y'e hear that?" as one of the singers got off a strong point.

The boys, in short, became noisy and uproarious as the strong drink got into their brains. They laughed, clapped and roared until they half-drowned the performers. Finally Bob mounted on the front of the box, and commenced to sing a comic song right in the midst of an affecting ballad by the premier tenor of the company.

This diversion was differently received by the audience. Some laughed and applauded. Others hooted.

"Go it, little one! Neck and neck! My cash on the boy!" cried some.

"Kick him out! Fling the gutter-rat down. Toss him over the footlights," yelled others.

The other two boys, in whose veins the liquor now ran riot, perched themselves beside Bob, and joined in the chorus of his song, while the uproar below grew deafening. Missiles began to fly. A half-eaten apple struck Phil squarely in the mouth, and knocked him headlong back into the box. As for Bob, he attempted to dodge a lager-beer glass, flung at him with a sure aim by one of the female performers. In doing so he lost his unsteady footing, and toppled over, falling upon the stage below.

But the distance was not great, and the boy had something of the agility of the cat. He landed on his feet, and half walked, half staggered, to the front, where he continued his song.

And now the uproar grew and spread until the place seemed like a Pandemonium.

Everybody was on his feet. All were in uproar and excitement. The performers rushed upon Bob, and kicked and cuffed him with praiseworthy energy; but the tipsy lad, while striking and clawing in return, continued his song, in such broken couplets as he was able to give out.

Nor did the fight continue so unequal. Phil and Jake leaped down from the box, and staggered into the midst of the fray. Some of Bob's brawny-armed partisans in the audience sprung upon the stage, and gave their powerful fists to his rescue. This was a strong reinforcement. The actors began to give way.

But now the proprietor and ticket-seller came to their rescue, and the tide of battle was again turned. Others of the audience, on both sides, sprung to the rescue, while the fight extended to the floor, where beer and whisky glasses came to the aid of fists in deciding the contest.

A wonderful uproar for one tipsy boy to create in a minute of time. As for the boys they were in the midst of the melee, but their diminutive size saved them from most of the blows, which passed over their heads, while they continued to wrestle, kick and bite with a vigorous worthy of a better cause.

Of the better dressed auditors some had slipped out at the commencement of the uproar; others stood laughing and applauding the fight; while several others had purposely or inadvertently become mixed in it, and were striking right and left with the skill of trained boxers.

"Hold up here! I've been robbed!" one of these suddenly cried. "Stop the mill! There's thieves about. I've been robbed, I say!"

"And s'pose you have!" growled a stalwart fellow before him. "Ther ain't no us' raisin' such a hellaballo about it. You shouldn't been sich an idiot to fetch money inter a hell-hole like this."

"You've got it yourself! It was you that grappled me!" cried the you h.

"I have, hey? Just come and take it, then. Square yerself now. I don't let no counter-jumper call me thief!"

But the young man's cries, joined to the previous uproar, caused a new diversion. Heavy steps sounded without. The door flew open and the light flashed on brazen stars.

"The police! the police!" was the cry, and at once the fight broke up into an effort to escape, the participants looking wildly to the right and left, like caged hounds.

As for the actors, they ran back into their dressing-room, from which a flight of stairs led to the upper portion of the building. The boys, and those of the audience who were on the stage, sought to follow, but the door was shut and locked, and they were all forced back.

Meanwhile the robbed youth kept up his cries, and the two officers who had entered laid hands on the man whom he accused, paying no attention to the remainder of the audience, who were far too numerous for them to handle.

These took advantage of this opportunity to escape ere any reinforcements should appear.

"What do you accuse this man of?" asked one of the officers.

"He has stolen my pockethook! It had over twenty dollars in it. He grappled me in the fight and robbed me!"

"Ye'r a derned liar!" growled the fellow, who stood perfectly quiet. "Ef any of you gen'lemen kin find a pocketbook about me, I'll knuckle down. Ain't seen twenty dollars for twenty weeks."

His declaration was followed by a loud cry from another quarter.

"I've been robbed, too! I've been robbed, too! All my money's gone!"

It was the voice of Bob Rockett.

"You been robbed!" growled the second policeman, looking at the ragged boy with a cynical smile. "What of, I'd like to know! If they stole the whole of you they wouldn't get much for their trouble."

"That's the rat as raised the muss," remarked the prisoner.

"Him? That boy? Stand still, then, my little chap. I'll attend to you after a while."

"I've been robbed, I say!" yelled Bob. "There goes the chap as went through me. Yonder he slides outer the door now. Stop thief! Stop thief!"

Unheeding the injunction of the policeman, Bob ran hastily after the imaginary thief, followed by the other boys. In a minute he had disappeared, leaving the policeman with their captive.

But the fellow seemed to have told the truth. They searched him in vain. There was no money to be found on him.

"I told ye I weren't no thief," he grumbled.

"At any rate you were in that riot. The rest have escaped, but we will lock you up, anyhow."

Meanwhile the boys had gained the street and put some distance between them and the door of the Varieties.

"Where's the fellow you were after, Bob?" asked Phil.

"Feller be shot!" ejaculated Bob. "Sold you, too, then, did I, as well as the peelers?"

"And what was all that fuss about?"

"'Cause I wanted to git safe outer the door."

"Then why didn't you git out, same as the others?"

"Was afeard I'd be stopped. Look yere! Yo won't say nothin'?"

"Nary word."

"Then squint at this."

He revealed, half covered in his hand, the leather back of a small pocketbook.

"The young chap must have dropped it," he cautiously said. "I nabbed it under a bench. High old fun, boys. The peelers will tote that galoot off for the thief, the young fool will whistle for his cash, and we'll have the fun out of it, you bet."

The tipsy young vagabond, having thus taken his second lesson in theft, staggered off, followed by his two tipsy companions, leaving an innocent victim to suffer for his crime.

CHAPTER VI.

A HOUSE-WARMING.

It was the morning after the events described in the last chapter. In a meanly-furnished and

indescribably-soiled apartment in the tenement-house mentioned in our first chapter, were two persons, a man and a woman. The first of these was a stalwart, hard-faced individual, with a skin like parchment, and a face marked with the unmistakable signs of intemperance. His features were a matured copy of those of Bob Rockett.

He seemed in a state of feverish impatience, springing up frequently from his chair behind the stove, and striding angrily across the room, while he caused to whistle through the air a stout leather strap which he grasped firmly in his hand.

"Blast his young top-knot!" he growled. "Oh, won't I salt him!"

"Now don't be too hard on the boy, Jacob," pleaded the woman, a slender, shrinking, red-eyed creature. "The poor dear don't have much amusement; and I suppose he's forgot how late—"

"Forgot, has he?" snapped the man. "I'll help his memory then."

At this moment the door slowly opened, and Bob Rockett entered, with a hesitating step. His eyes had a bleared look, and there were patches of dried blood upon his face, remnants of the recent battle.

The father stood erect confronting him, his hand behind his back, a look of enforced gravity upon his face.

"Hain't breakfass near ready, mom?" asked the boy, with assumed carelessness. "I'm hungry."

"Hungry, hey?" gasped the father. "Been out late, ain't ye?"

"Yes. Got locked out, dad." Bob stuck his hands in his pockets and whistled a bar of music. "Had to bunk on a dry goods box." (Still whistling.) "Lock up this 'stablishment mighty early. Breakfass most ready, mom?"

"It will be very soon, dear," replied his mother, her eyes resting with a frightened look upon the erect, stern-faced man.

"It's ready now. Cooked and 'bout to be sarved up," said the father, grimly. "Take off that coat."

"What fer? I ain't cold, dad."

"Guess you want a warmin'," was the grim reply. "Off with it now!"

With remarkable deliberation, Bob removed the coat, his eyes fixed warily upon his paternal parent.

In an instant the latter sprung forward, the enforced gravity of his face replaced by a flush of rage. Seizing the unresisting boy by the collar, he jerked his other hand from behind his back, and brought the stout strap, with a whistling thud, upon his errant son's back.

And now there was a scene of old-fashioned paternal chastisement. Bob made no effort to escape, as his father dragged him violently about the room, continuing to use the strap with all the force of his vigorous arm.

Bob evidently had steeled himself for the inevitable. He said nothing, and gave no expression of pain, but his face assumed a hard, stolid look which showed that the whipping was not producing the desired effect upon his conscience.

Mrs. Rockett stood apart, wringing her hands,

and shuddering at every blow as if she herself had received it.

"Won't that do now, Jacob?" she pleaded. "He didn't go to it, I know."

"I suppose not," grimly. "All accerdent, of course. Only I don't approve of accerdents. He's jist altogether too much given to accerdents."

He shook the boy to remind him that accidents were not to be permitted in well regulated families. The vigorous shake had an unexpected effect. An object fell from Bob's pocket on which his father instantly pounced.

"What's this?" he cried. "A pocket-book, hey? Where the blazes did you git a pocket-book?—And money in it—ten—twenty—twenty-two dollars!"

He extended the bank-notes, and looked with a peculiar expression into the sheepish face of his son. With a sudden movement Mr. Rockett grasped the boy's collar again and inserted his hand in his pockets. It came out with more bank notes grasped between the fingers.

He stood erect, holding out his two hands with the money, and casting a look upon Bob intended to be of withering severity.

"So!" he at length ejaculated. "It's come to this, bey? Look here, mother! Thievin'! Yer fine boy's thievin'! Oh, that I should ever lived to see the day! Where did it ever come from, you owdacious villain?"

The poor mother was crouched down, with her apron to her eyes, her poor soul half-broken by the thought.

"I dunno," answered Bob, doggedly.

"Don't know, eh? It came inter yer pocket itself, I s'pose?"

"Guess somebody stuck it thar," persisted the boy.

"I see how it is. You want a little more strap! Ha! what's that? Somebody comin' here? Git into bed instantly, you reprobate! It's after you he is!"

Kicking the strap and the empty pocket-book aside, Mr. Rockett crushed the money hastily into his pockets as he turned to face the door, on which, at that moment, there came a sharp rap.

Bob had obeyed orders, and instantly slipped under the covers of a narrow bed that stood at one side of the room.

"Come in," said Mr. Rockett.

The door opened and a young man entered, a clerkly-looking youth.

"Here I am again after the boy," he announced. "There is his machine standing idle these two days, and the work wanting. Mr. Jones says that he will discharge him if he does not come to work at once."

It was remarkable what a change had come upon Mr. Rockett's face. A look of humility and of deprecation had replaced its stern indignation. He twisted his hard features into an expression of alarm as he replied to the youth:

"I am ever so sorry, but the lad has been in a dangerous state. Won't you explain to Mr. Jones? The doctor says he's afear'd it's a fever. He's left some drops which he thinks will break it, and I'll send the boy 'round this very day if he's only able."

"Sick," replied the youth doubtfully. "Not

sick in the streets, is he? I was here yesterday, and he was not in sight."

"That must have been when he went fer the doctor," explained Mr. Rockett. "He's in bed now, poor dear, and tremblin' like a leaf. Look at his face how pale he is!"

It was not exactly pallor that marked Bob Rockett's face, though it was covered up too closely for the messenger to have a fair view of it.

"How do you feel now, my boy?" asked the father, with a great show of anxiety.

"Very weak and shivering," groaned Bob, from un'er his coverings.

"You see, sir. Maybe the drops will bring him 'round. But I know Mr. Jones wouldn't ask a boy to work when he's too sick to be out of bed."

"He must get around soon then," answered the youth, a trifle suspiciously. "Our machines can't stand idle."

Turning on his heel he left the room, without another word.

Mr. Rockett looked at the closed door for a minute. He then turned his eyes upon his worthy offspring. The old expression came back upon his face.

"That's what's come to the Rocketts," he groaned. "One of the 'spectable fam'lies in the country. All through a thievin' boy. He's made his poor father a liar, when he was allers brung up ter speak the truth.—Git up, you hound!" with a sudden outburst of anger. "It's time you was gettin' them drops which the doctor's left fer you."

He whirled the strap, which he had again picked up, significantly in the air.

"Guess I've had 'nough drops fer to-day, dad," replied Bob. "Best gi'n me that cash, and le' me take it back to the chap as stuck it in my pocket, 'cause he was afear'd he mought lose it."

"Listen to his owdacious lies!" and Mr. Rockett held up his hands in horror. "I'll take care of that cash, boy. Just refer that young gentleman to me. You mought git robbed, you know, with so much money in yer pocket.—Guess you best give the boy some breakfast, mother," in a mollified tone. "He's most convalescent."

But we must leave this domestic scene to look after the welfare of Grace Garland, the young lady so fortunately rescued from drowning, and concerning whom the reader may feel interested.

We find her again in a poorly-furnished but cleanly room, neatly carpeted, and showing signs of careful housekeeping. In it moves briskly around a middle-aged, but sprightly and well-preserved little woman, with a face full of kindness and sympathy.

In a rocking-chair near the window sits Miss Garland. She has recovered her color, and presents a strikingly beautiful face, full of youth, modesty and earnestness. She is dressed in a plain traveling costume, as if she had been on the point of making a journey.

"I know I am ever so happy to have you here," affirmed the little woman, in pursuance of a conversation. "You are not the least bit

of trouble to me; and I am glad the boys could think of no better place to bring you."

"I shall not soon forget your kindness, Mrs. Essex," replied the musical voice of the young lady. "You and your son have made martyrs of yourselves in my service.—It is all so strange," she continued, "the news from the West, the effort to drown me, my fortunate rescue, and now the answer to my telegram, that my father is perfectly well and that be sent no such message as that I received. What to make of it all I do not know. It seems like a plan to murder me; but who, who could be so base? Who could so hate me as to wish to destroy me?" Her face was full of intense reflection.

"Some desperate villain, that is sure," said the little woman, energetically.

Their conversation was interrupted by the opening of the door, and the entrance of the tall handsome boy who had had the fight with Bob Rockett a few nights previous.

"Is school out already, Paul?" asked his mother, looking with pride on her son.

"Yes, mother. And I have something of interest for Miss Garland. I have the morning *Herald* here, and it has the strangest advertisement in it. It must mean her."

The young lady's eyes were lifted with a sudden flash.

"Something about me, Paul?" and an eager look came upon her face.

"Yes. A notice of a strange disappearance. I will read it:

"MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE!" he read. "A very strange affair has just come to light, affecting one of the wealthiest and most fashionable of our families. A beautiful young lady, the daughter of a prominent merchant, has suddenly disappeared, and no trace remains of her whereabouts. But the most surprising part of the affair is that her disappearance seems in consequence of a concerted plot. She received a telegraphic message detailing the sudden death of her father, who is now in Louisville, Kentucky; immediately after which she took a westward bound train on the Erie road. Since that moment all trace of her has been lost. Further messages prove that her father is perfectly well, and no one knows the origin of the false telegram. Every station on the road has been communicated with, and the conductors been put on the lookout, but no such person appears to be on the trains, or to have left at any station, so far as can be ascertained. This matter wears a most serious look. The police are seeking clews in all directions, and a reward has been offered for any information, but as yet all is in doubt. The family has been plunged into the deepest distress."

Silence followed the reading of the newspaper notice.

"Fortunately I have written to my father, advising him that all is well," said Miss Garland, over whose speaking features conflicting emotions had passed. "But who has offered a reward for my discovery?"

Paul had meanwhile been looking over the remaining pages of the paper.

"Here it is," he said. "One thousand dollars fer any clew to your whereabouts. Five thousand fer your recovery. I hope that Bob Rockett and none of his party will see that, or I am afraid you would have to offer them more to hold their tongues."

"Let me see it!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Is it signed by any name?"

"Yes, George Delorme."

"Ah!"

This was half a sigh, half an exclamation. She sat in silence, holding the paper listlessly in her hand, while a deep flush slowly crimsoned her face. Her expression was enigmatical. Paul and his mother looked at her in silence, not knowing what to make of this strange display of feeling.

Several minutes passed before she lifted the paper to read the advertisement; but they seemed minutes of intense thought.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ART OF THE SIREN.

We must return to the boudoir of Marie Ormiston. It remains precisely as we saw it in our previous visit; its young lady occupant reclining in the same listless way upon the sofa, engaged in reading a novel.

After a few minutes, however, her hand dropped to her side, as if other thoughts had crossed the current of her book. She lay with her eyes fixed steadily upon the opposite wall, a peculiar luster burning in their depths, as glittering as that of the tiger before its leap.

"My path is clear," she muttered. "She no longer maddens me with her hateful beauty, or rends from me him for whom my whole soul burns. Ah, my love! my love! mine you shall be, despite this siren who has so long enchanted you. Delorme, my love! my love!"

Flinging the book fiercely from her, she rose and walked the room with a step of feverish impatience, a gleam of triumph and passion in her eyes.

"My emissaries have faithfully performed their work," she exclaimed. "She is gone, gone! No trace remains. The hungry sea has swallowed her, and she will never cross my path again. But can I trust them? Yet they know me not. I was too shrewd to let myself be known to these base cut-throats. And if they did they are too deeply involved themselves, that I should fear them."

She seated herself and picked up her book, seeking to take up again the train of the story. But after a minute she crushed it fiercely in her hands.

"It is too tame, too tame to fit my fiery soul! I am myself living out a story tenfold more intense than this idle tale. But he? He has returned. Why is he not here?"

Five minutes passed. She sat still absorbed in passionate reflection, an intense fire burning in her brilliant black eyes. At the end of that time her reverie was broken by a rap upon the door. She sprung hastily from her seat, drew her hand over her face as if she would brush from it every trace of these forbidden thoughts, and turned toward the door, resting her hand upon the back of the chair.

"Who is there?" she asked.

The door opened, and a servant appeared.

"Mr. Delorme," was announced.

"Delorme! Show him up instantly!" her voice full of unrepressed eagerness.

As the young man entered the room with a very sad look in his eyes, she stepped hastily forward, grasped his arm with her two hands, and bent her dark orbs earnestly upon his face.

"Tell me the worst!" she exclaimed. "But I have heard all. You return unsuccessful. Dear, poor Grace has not been found!"

"She has not been found," he echoed, falling into a chair, and drawing his hand hastily across his saddened eyes.

"But, George—Mr. Delorme—excuse my thoughtless haste. But what do you think? What do you fear? Oh! do not say that anything serious, anything dreadful has happened!"

She stood before him, bending in her assumed feeling until her warm face almost touched his, her fragrant breath stirred his drooping locks. It was like a vision of luxuriant youth forced upon his drooping eyes. He could not but feel the sense of her rich, fervent beauty.

"I know not what to think," he said. "I fear the worst. Yet she could have had no enemies. Who then have deceived her, and stolen her from us? And for what? Is it for ransom, or for some more dreadful fate?"

With a face full of assumed feeling Marie drew a chair beside his, and seated herself so that he could not but look upon the impassioned bloom of her loveliness.

"It is indeed too terrible to think of," she murmured. "But, George—forgive my familiarity, but I feel so near to you at this moment—that you will do all that man can do, I know. And I will aid you to the extent of my weak power. We can do no more. If she be lost beyond recovery we can but weep for her together."

She had caught his hand between both of hers, and pressed it as with unthinking fervor, while her bright, suffused eyes were fixed on his with an expression that seemed but pain and sympathetic feeling, yet which stirred him as no mere look of grief could have done.

"Marie," he said, lifting his eyes with a quick gleam to her flushing face, while his free hand caught hers in an earnest clasp. "Thanks for this warm sympathy. I knew that you were a friend of Grace. But that you loved her thus—"

"Who could but love her?" she hastily interrupted. "I am not demonstrative, as you know; but yet I can love deeply and purely."

Not demonstrative! And yet her whole being was burning upon his, with a fervor illy concealed by her assumed grief, and which affected him more strangely and deeply than he could have deemed possible, so soon after the loss of his betrothed. Yet he was a man, young and warm-hearted, and it was not easy to withstand the electric touch of those clasping hands, the warm flush of that impassioned face, the fragrance of that perfumed breath.

The cunning siren had almost taken him captive in the first rebound from the deep grief which had overwhelmed him for days.

For half an hour they sat thus, conversing in murmuring tones, their subject still being that of their mutual loss, but their hands clasped, their eyes reading each other's depths, their faces very close together.

A sigh came from his lips as he at length broke from his temporary enchantment.

"I must go now," he said. "What to do next I know not. Every possible measure has been

taken. The police warned. A large reward offered."

"A large reward?" her lips were opened with an instantaneous sense of fear.

"Yes. Five thousand dollars. I hope it may prove successful."

"I hope so indeed! Good-by. Good-by—George. Don't fail to return soon. I must know all, and at once."

"You shall," he replied, pressing her hand with undue warmth.

She stood and looked at the closed door, a strange smile slowly breaking upon her face, a smile of triumph and passion, of burning hope and of flushing delight.

She fell back again into her chair, her eyes still fixed upon the door, while the smile became a laugh that rung strangely through that silent room.

"Caught at last!" she cried triumphantly. "Limed! Caged! He is in the circle of my enchantments, and he shall not escape me again! Oh, if I dared tell him how I love him, with what hot fervor my soul burns for him! But that time will come. I have taken the first step. I must move with infinite caution, lest my bird break his fetters ere I have him fully en-chained."

There seemed, indeed, something of the tigress in that beautiful woman, as she sat thus with her whole face alive with a passion too fierce for civilized souls. She seemed as if born in the depths of the tameless forest, where passion is free, and love is that of the strongest.

But a new look came upon her face, a quick shudder as of fear.

"A reward!" she muttered, with a dark look. "Can they dare prove false? They know my face, though not my residence. They may seek me.—Yet I fear them not. They are involved as deeply as I. They dare not betray me!"

And the haughty pride of a daring soul arose in the strong lines of her face.

But we must leave her to her unholy hopes and fears, and seek some of the younger characters of our story.

It is mid-afternoon that we find Bob Rockett, with his two comrades of the night's carouse, seated upon a heap of stones, near one of the East River wharves. They all three look the worse for wear, their faces still showing marks of the beating they received.

"You didn't go to work to-day, Bob," said Phil.

"To work? Not much. Old Jones sent fer me, but the guv'ner covered me up, and I played off sick.—Nor I weren't none too well neither."

"I know I was sick as a horse," ejaculated Jake. "You don't catch me swallowing no more whisky."

Bob laughed sneeringly.

"Ain't got yer eddication yit, boy. Blazes, 'fore ye'r ten years older you kin carry a pint without a stagger. But, fellers, did ye git any touch of Baliysnoogin?"

The two boys remained quiet, with a look of shame upon their faces.

"Ye jist mought as well own up. I cotched partikler thunder, I did. The boss was waitin' fer me with a strap; and didn't he whale me?"

"Well, maybe he didn't," and Bob rubbed his back with a comical grimace.

"I'd thought you'd kick ag'in' it," said Phil, with some disdain.

"Kick ag'in' it? Kick ag'in' the guv'ner?—Well, I dunno what kind o' dads you chaps is got. Why, blazes, boys, he'd mash me inter mince-meat if I kicked. I jist take it, that's all. I'll be older some of these days," and a wicked look came into his eyes.

"I ain't got no dad, you know," remarked Phil. "And mother's kind of easy. She thought I was too sick and couldn't git home."

"My dad was off to work 'fore I got home," said Jake. "I'll salt him up that they kept me at work in the bakery all night. He takes things in easy."

"But suppose he asks for your night's wages?" suggested Phil.

"We'll settle that out of our divvies. Ain't it 'bout time you was a-splittin' up that pocket-book, Bob?"

"I'm afeard you'll have to go ax Dad Rockett fer that," said Bob with a groan. "He jist shook me inside out, and nabbed the cash. He's goin' to take it back to the young feller, ye know—the young feller as keeps the gin-mill down in Shady Alley."

A look of dissatisfaction came upon the faces of the others.

"Look here, Bob, that cat won't jump."

"Go and ask dad, then, if you don't believe me," said Bob, earnestly.

"Now, come, shell out."

"See here, boys, it's gone, and ther's no use whistlin'. I'm goin' through his pockets if I git a chance, 'cause he hadn't no right to rob me. But if he catches me at it, oh, Moses! won't he wrastle me! But I'll tell you what it is, lads, ther's somethin' in the wind that's ten times better nor that."

"What is it?"—doubtfully.

"We ain't seen the color of that lady's money yet."

"No."

"It's all promises, and promises don't butter no parsnips fer me. If she ain't a-goin' to pay us I'll find out who will. Ther's somebody somewhar as wants her out o' the way, and I'll pony up rich to find out all we know."

"Do you want to sell her back to them murderers, Bob Rockett?" cried Phil, with a voice full of indignation.

"I ain't goin' to snatch young women outer the river fer nothin'," said Bob, doggedly.

"Do you know what you are?" exclaimed Phil, with fierce disgust. "You're a derned young liar and robber! And now you want to turn traitor, too. You've got that money in your pocket now, and if you don't pony up Jake and me's just the chaps to leather it out of you!"

"You will—you?" cried Bob, springing to his feet and doubling his fists. "You'll lick me, hey? Come ahead, then. Are you in it, Jake?"

"You bet I am!"

"Sail in then, the pair of you! Ye'r' infernal cowards and skunks anyhow, and if I don't lather you both, ther's no snakes!"

His two angry comrades had risen and confronted him; but before they could strike a

blow, or were quite ready for the fray, Bob took Phil between the eyes with a sharp stroke of his left hand.

The unprepared boy was toppled over headlong on the heap of stones.

"There's your gravy! Square yerself, Jake, fer I'm a-goin' to polish ye!"

Jake was nearer his match in size, and for a minute there was a sharp exchange of blows, without advantage to either.

And now Phil, who had instantly regained his feet, joined the fight, and the bully found himself confronted by two, who were likely to give him more work than he bargained for. He was their superior, however, in skill and quickness, and punished them quite as much as they did him.

The fray went on thus for several minutes without advantage on either side. But Bob was only waiting for his opportunity. Suddenly he stooped and caught Jake with a wrestler's hold around the legs. Rising with a quick, strong lift, the unwary boy was raised from his feet, and flung, with stunning force, upon the rough heap of stones.

Unheeding a kick in the face from Phil during this movement, Bob rose again and grasped his remaining antagonist around the body.

A moment's tussling and staggering over the uneven ground, and then Phil, who was no match for his stronger foe in a hand-to-hand contest, was flung violently down upon the body of his prostrate ally.

But the battle was not over yet. Bob Rockett was cruel and pitiless by nature, and when once the savage in him was aroused he had all the instinct of a wild beast.

He flung himself upon the two defeated boys, kicking and pummeling them savagely, until their clothes were torn into rags and the blood flowing in streams from their faces.

To what length the human tiger-cub would have gone in this merciless rending of his prey it is difficult to tell. Fortunately for the others some passers-by ran up and tore him from off their prostrate bodies, be kicking, swearing and yelling with the uncontrollable fury of a young fiend.

CHAPTER VIII.

BOB ROCKETT TAKES A RESOLUTION.

IT was in a nail and rivet making establishment that the promising youth, Bob Rockett, was employed. In fact, he was one of the chief supports of the Rockett family, for the worthy head of the household was by no means given to steady labor, and expended much of his surplus energy in keeping his son to his work. This honest gentleman was, just now, waiting a claimant for the money he had recovered from his dishonest son, and groaning in spirit to think that his system of bringing up children had not had a better effect.

But as he waited in one of those interesting establishments vulgarly called a "whisky mill," and solaced his conscience with a drink between every two groans, there was danger of being a serious fall in the funds unless the unlucky loser should call very soon.

Old Rockett had an extraordinary power of

absorbing whisky without visible effect, a faculty in which he seemed likely to be emulated, in time, by his worthy son, who, as we have seen, had already begun to take lessons in the art.

On the morning in which we again seek this youthful reprobate the nail factory was a perfect sea of rattling, clinking and clashing noises, the roar of the pulleys and the sharp thunder of dozens of noisy machines filling the air with their uproar.

Bob was at a great revolving grindstone, busily engaged in sharpening a long steel tool, from which a shower of flashing sparks flew as he pressed it heavily upon the stone. His thoughts took flight with the sparks, and were far away from the labor in which his hands were engaged.

"What are you at there, boy?" came a sharp voice. "You are grinding the bevel out of that tool."

"All right," answered Bob, coolly. "That old bevel was played out. I'm going to dig a new one in t'other side."

"That to thunder!" cried the foreman. "We cannot have steel wasted at that rate. Give me the tool."

Handing it to him, Bob stood aside, with his tongue in his cheek and his hands in his pocket, watching the foreman at his labor.

"See here," said the latter. "This is the way to hold it. I've told you often enough before. Lift the handle this way, and don't bear too hard on the stone. Do you see?"

"Go ahead. Let's see it out," replied Bob, with cool impudence.

The man looked up sharply, but the boy was regarding him with a display of close attention that disarmed his suspicions.

"You're a smart one, maybe, but don't try it on me," he growled. "That is, if you don't want your ears warmed with the handle of the tool. Here it is now. I have too much else on hand to do your work for you."

There was a mocking smile on the boy's face as he received the tool.

"Much obliged," he said, with a great show of politeness. "A lesson once in a while does the smartest feller good."

The foreman again looked round suspiciously, not quite sure but that Bob was chafing him. But the boy was going so soberly to work that the man turned away.

"I can never make out whether that chap is knave or fool," he said to himself. "I'll have to give him a settler on the knowledge-box some day yet, to find out. He looks to me to have the making of an infernal reprobate in him."

"Jist let's see 'you try the tool handle on my ears,'" Bob was saying. "Ye mought wake up the wrong coon. I'm afeard ther's goin' to be a tearin'-down row in these diggin's some day not fur off. I ain't goin' to be sot down on by no six-foot rule like that ther' foreman."

The sparks were again flying from his tool. In a minute more his thoughts had taken flight after them again.

"Ef the gal don't fork over, ther's them as will," he said to himself, with a grim setting of his lips. "I ain't goin' to risk my life in cold

water fer nothin'. Ef I kin on'y lay hands on them as tried to put her outer the way! Them's the ones as'd shell out.—'Tain't me doin' nothin'. Got a right to give a little hint, I s'pose. Ther' ain't no law-breakin' in that. It's fer her to take care of herself. I've done my sheer, and I ain't bound to keep no secrets."

Revolving such dark thoughts in his young brain, the evil-souled boy took the sharp instrument from the stone, feeling its keen edge with a look of enigmatical character. Some might have called it reflective. Some would have called it devilish.

With a lagging step he walked toward the machine on which he was engaged. This was a lathe for finishing the heads of the finer rivets, the sharp edge of the steel tool cutting away the rough iron with as much ease as though it had been cheese, instead of hard metal. One by one they fell, with glittering and polished heads, with that marvelous rapidity which alone enables trade to supply the growing wants of the world.

This was the home of honest industry. It must be evident to our readers that Bob Rockett was not at home in any such locality. He was on the downward track that leads from honesty into crime, and his vagrant instincts were likely soon to lead him into haunts of more congenial labor, despite the terror of that paternal strap, or the influence of the paternal example.

"Ef I could on'y track 'em," he continued to himself. "There's a good show somewhere here, and I ain't goin' to let it slide through my fingers without it's leavin' somethin' to stick there. Sich chances ain't flung at a chap's head every day."

The day passed on. Evening came, and with it the boy's release from his labor. But the day had not passed by without his making up his mind on various points, which he now proceeded to put into effect.

A portion of this programme was a visit to Miss Garland. Bob wanted to see what chance there was for reward in that quarter, before acting elsewhere.

Mrs. Essex lost the pleasant expression of her countenance for an instant on seeing Bob Rockett enter, with scant ceremony, her humble home. She did not like him, and feared his influence over Paul.

But Miss Garland saw him with different emotions.

"My young friend!" she said, with much feeling. "To whom I owe my life! I hope to repay, if I ever can repay such a service."

She grasped the boy's hand in a warm pressure, unheeding the lowering expression which dwelt upon his unprepossessing visage.

"I s'pose so," he curtly said, seating himself with easy assurance.

"My father is wealthy," she continued. "As soon as he has returned, and the object of my concealment is gained, I will see that you are remembered."

"I remember a good many folks," he replied, "and I don't know as they're much better off for it. Some of 'em I remember to gi'n 'em a beatin' the next time I run afoul of 'm. So remembering ain't of no extra 'count in these diggin's."

Miss Garland smiled, though it was evident she did not like the boy's tone.

"How would you like to be remembered?" she asked.

"In any 'spectable way. Cash payments is mighty convenyant 'round our way, if on'y my old dad don't git his ten fingers on't. Or a chap mought be set up in some sort o' bizness."

"I shall not forget," she repeated, with a grave face. Yet it was evident that he was rapidly canceling her debt of gratitude.

Bob sat for several minutes in complete silence, his face dark and lowering. Miss Garland looked at him in surprise. What did he want? Was he waiting for her to name some definite sum at which to value his services? She was puzzled.

She was more so when the boy suddenly rose, firmly setting on his head the cap he had so far held in his hand. He walked to the door.

"You aren't going?" asked Mrs. Essex, in surprise at his manner.

"I reckon so," he gruffly replied, as he left the room.

"She's a-playin' with me," he said to himself, on getting outside. "All right, my lady, ther's them as'll come more to the p'int. And I'm a-goin' fer 'em too, if ther's any findin' 'em."

"What is the matter with the boy?" asked Mrs. Essex, looking after him in surprise.

"I do not understand his behavior," replied Miss Garland. "And I certainly do not like his face. Can he know anything? Can he have seen that offer of reward? Perhaps he is trying to discover which is likely to be most profitable, to aid or to betray me."

"Him? Ho's the rascalliest young scallawag in this part of New York," said Mrs. Essex with energy.

At this moment Paul entered the room, followed almost immediately by a sturdily-formed, well-dressed person, with a quiet, self-possessed, but very keen face.

Miss Garland raised her eyes with a gleam of expectation.

"Any news?" she asked.

"We have found no clew as yet," replied this person. "But there is something which may lead to a clew. You say that you can imagine no possible reason why you should have been assaulted?"

"None whatever," she replied.

"This gentleman who offers the reward, this Mr. George Delorme. Excuse me for asking if he bore any intimate relation to you?"

A faint color came into her face. Her eyes fell.

"The relation of lover," she said, in a low tone.

"And Miss Marie Ormiston, who was last with you on that day. Did any close friendship exist between her and Mr. Delorme?"

"No," decidedly. "They were acquaintances merely."

"Have you no reason to think that she may have felt a deeper interest in him?"

"Why, no," in great surprise. "She always seemed to me very indifferent."

The gentleman was silent for a minute, as if revolving these answers.

"There may be a clew," he said.

"Ah! What do you mean? Why have you asked such strange questions?"

"Because a very strong intimacy has arisen between Mr. Delorme and Miss Ormiston. I would not be giving it too strong a title to call it love, judging from some remarkable evidence of it, of which I have learned."

Miss Garland's face grew white, her breath came and went in quick aspirations; her eyes fixed themselves with a strange look of affright upon his face.

CHAPTER IX BOB MAKES A DISCOVERY.

"AIN'T no use axin' me when I'll be home. I've told you that off'n 'nough for you to quit sich nonsensical palaverin," and Rusty Mike pulled his hat down over his eyes with a dark frown.

Kicking the door open to save himself the trouble of raising the latch, Mike stalked out with a swaggering gait.

Sally turned to Beau Bink, who was stretching his long limbs in his favorite corner.

"After more thieving, I suppose," she said, with an accent of dissatisfaction. "Mike's always cross when he has a job in his eye. Between me and you I'd give something if he had an honest business."

"Edzactly, Mrs. Sally, edzactly," exclaimed Beau, with great show of approbation. "I don't approve of Mike's line. It's too—well, it's too uncertain, and they're apt to jug a person too severe when they once grab them. Now, if he'd only take up the genteel, respectable branch of the profession, like mine. It's more high-toned, Mrs. Sally, and it's safer; if there ain't as big hauls in it."

"Why, you long-eared Jack!" cried Sally in disdain, "do you think I want him to give up house opening and go to pocket grubbing? That would be reforming with a vengeance. I'd like to see Mike an honest man, not ashamed to look any man in the face, and free from this constant skulking from the law; or the gallows, which it may come to. Why it isn't a week since he made a big haul; enough to keep him for two years to come. And yet he has made cats and dogs of the most of it already, and is in the market again."

She sighed deeply, as if she felt that hope was dead for her.

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Sally," chimed in Beau, with his perpetual smirk. "Honesty is just the best thing going. And there would be a good deal more of it afloat, only folks have to live, you know."

Sally turned away with an impatient jerk of the shoulder. Talking to Beau Bink was like talking to a stream of water, that always appeared to be there yet was always slipping away from you.

Yet there was another auditor to this conversation. The door had remained a crack open after Rusty Mike's exit, and at this crack was an ear that had more of curiosity than of honor.

"Made a haul 'bout a week ago, did he?"

queried Bob Rockett, the listener in question. "Yet ther' wasn't no talk 'bout a bu'sted crib, nor no sort o' plunderin'. Wonder where it come from?"

He pushed the door open and entered.

"Who's there?" asked Sally, turning around quickly.

"It's only me. Bob, you know," and the boy walked in with the easy assurance of a frequent visitor.

"Well, and if it is *only me* I don't know as anybody sent you a special invitation," answered Sally, sharply.

"What's broke loose?" asked the boy, with a laugh. "I didn't know as I had trod on anybody's corns."

"It's Mike," said Beau Bink, in a stage whisper, putting his two hands to his mouth to serve as a speaking trumpet. "He's been kicking up a trifle of a dust. Come here, Bob, I want to chat with you a bit. 'Bout the benefits of going to school, and all that, as every boy ought to; and the 'vantages of being honest and steady."

Mrs. Sally's temper did not cool very quickly, for she was of that direct nature that loves an open rogue better than a canting hypocrite, and Beau's spasms of honesty disgusted her.

There was no little rattling and clicking of chairs and dishes as she bustled about the room, gradually growing calmer, however, as the minutes passed on.

Beau winked to his boyish companion.

"The storm's 'most gone down," he whispered. "Won't be long before we'll have blue skies."

With an answering wink Bob arose and approached the ruffled lady of the house.

"Well, I swan!" he cried, "if we ain't puttin' on airs. That's as handsome a handkercher as they've got in Stewart's! Where ever did you git that, Mrs. Crapper?"

"I don't know that it is any of your business," she answered, yet a flush which came into her cheek showed that she was not quite displeased by the boy's praise.

The handkerchief in question was a fine, lace-edged one, which she wore tied rather carelessly around her throat.

"It's a pretty one, anyhow," he persisted, approaching and taking hold of the end of the handkerchief with the air of a connoisseur. "Have it imported, Mrs. Crapper?"

"I'll have you exported, if you come with your monkey tricks around here," said Sally, smiling. "That's a birthday present from Mike."

"Birthday, eh? Mike must be gettin' kinder cur'us. Hope he ain't goin' to die soon. I never seed it afore, anyhow."

"I have only been wearing it fer a week."

A quick flash shot from Bob's eyes.

"Thought 't bad yer o' n 'nitals on't," he said. "G. G. don't spell Sally Crapper. That's a queer mistake for Mike to make."

She snatched the handkerchief from his grasp.

"Get out, you scapegrace. You're a deal too knowing for a boy of your size. Take my advice and look out that that long tongue of yours never brings you into trouble."

Bob laughed recklessly.

"Guess I'll make tracks. Don't see as I'm wanted here. Good-by."

He strolled out of the room with a swagger which seemed a close copy of that of Rusty Mike.

Beau and Mrs. Crapper looked at each other and laughed.

"We needn't be afeard that the old stock will die out. He's the making of a prime one, that boy," remarked Beau.

"And is taking the first steps on the high road to the gallows," rejoined Sally.

But a very different set of thoughts were passing through Bob's astute brain.

"I'll bet a cow and two pigs that I've hit the nail squar' on the head," he said to himself. "G. G. stands fur Grace Garland, if it don't fit fer Sally Crapper. I tell you, ther's fun in the wind. Rusty Mike made a haul of cash 'bout a week ago 'thout any crib cracked. Don't I know whar it come from? Maybe I don't, then!"

If we had been, an hour after the time of this scene, on a dark corner of Wall street, not touched by the moonlight which flooded the opposite corner, we might have seen our boy again, this time in deep conversation with the very individual against whom he had entertained such dark suspicions, Rusty Mike himself.

"S'pose I hain't had my eye on you, boy," remarked Rusty Mike, energetically. "You're no slouch. There's the makin' of a man in you if ye'r' well-trained. But, in course, you want a bizness eddication, as everybody's got to have what wants to make his way in the world."

"That's what dad says," answered Bob. "And I'm gettin' one—turnin' rivet-heads."

Mike laughed disdainfully.

"I like a coon, and you're one," he asserted. "See here, boy, I've took a fancy to you, and I wouldn't stop long takin' you in hand. I'm the chap as'll make a man of ye."

"In what way?" asked Bob.

"Ther's varyus ways. A boy of your size could be made mighty useful in a job that's on hand now. Ther's a sort of transom to slip through, and then just slide back a bit of a bolt. It's jist as easy as kissin' yer hand—and it'll be worth money to you, boy. More nor you'd make in a month at that factory."

"I don't jist altogether take that in," replied Bob, speaking very slowly and gravely. "But it sounds to me as if ther' was a bit of burglarin' bizness behind it."

"Hush, boy," warningly. "Ther' are some folks as give it that name, I'll allow."

"And so that's what you want me fer?"

"To give you yer first lesson in eddication," remarked Mike.

"And do you know what dad Rockett has al-lers been a-tellin' me?"

"Blazes on dad Rockett! What's he got to do with it?"

"He says as honesty is the best policy, and I guess it is. Looke here, Rusty Mike, ye'r' off yer eggs with this chicken. I'm up to boy's tricks, I s'pose, but I ain't took to thievin', and ain't a-goin' to. Dad Rockett's told me too of'n where it begins, and where it ends."

"He's a high old preacher, your dad is," replied Mike, with a grim laugh. "Just don't be

too smart, boy. Why, don't you know that the biggest bugs in this 'ere country has been the biggest thieves?"

"But 'tain't that way with the little thieves," answered Bob. "Ain't dad Rockett posted me? There's the stone jug fur them fu'st, and the gallc 's last. That's the reg'lar programme."

"That's only for the fools," rejoined Mike, his face darkening. "They've only nabbed me once in my life. And then they didn't keep me. A chap's only got to be cute and he's all right."

The shrewd boy looked at him for a minute in silence.

"Maybe so," he said at length, in a reflective tone. "But ther's one p'int I wish you'd post me on, Mr. Crapper; 'cause a boy can't be 'specte to know all the ins and outs of things. S'pose a chap as has been a burglar was to take to wuss ways—sewin' wimmen up in bags, say; and rowin' 'em out inter the river, and givin' them a 'one, two, three and away.' S'pose ther' was—"

But Mike was upon his feet, his face pale, his eyes blazing, his fists clinched.

"D'ye want me to murder you, boy?" he fiercely hissed. "If ye'r' tryin' to hint that—But blurt it out now. Let's hear the balance, afore I mash ye."

"I don't know what you mean," said Bob, with a tone of assumed innocence.

"You lie! you rat-terrier! You're hintin' at somethin'! You've seen somethin'. Out with it, you whipper-snapper!"

"Don't hit me now, Mr. Crapper," broke in Bob, with a show of fear. "I ain't said nothing as I knows on, to make such a noise about. I was jest s'posin'—"

"You know somethin', blast you! Out with it now, or I'll salt you!" and Mike shook him as a terrier might shake a mouse.

"Let me go, Mr. Crapper," blurted Bob, with assumed terror. "I didn't say as you'd been sewin' wimmen into bags, and flingin' 'em overboard, and drownin' 'em. I didn't—"

But further words were cut short by a savage blow which the frightened and infuriated villain dealt at the boy, whom he still grasped by the shoulder.

It might have been a serious blow for Bob for Mike's fists were like sledge-hammers, and his arms like bars of iron. It would be easy to smash a weasel, if the weasel would but wait to be smashed. But Mike's fist met only the brick wall behind the boy, who was no longer there.

He had slipped like an eel from the grasp of his foe, and darted swiftly away. A mocking laugh came from a dark part of the street, at the same instant as Rusty Mike was cursing over his damaged knuckles.

CHAPTER X.

OLD SMUDGE'S TENANTS.

IT is supper time at old Smudge's. But that remarkable old gentleman does not dine alone; not he. In short, meal time in that mansion reveals certain secrets of the establishment other than those seen in the sales-room of odds and ends, which form the ostensible feature of the house. The supper-table, in fact, introduces us to Smudge's tenants, and a most remarkable set of tenants they are.

The table is set in an upper room of the building, a long, white-washed apartment, with cobwebs hanging thickly from the ceiling, and the windows festooned so closely that the sunlight has trouble enough to find room to enter.

As for the table-service it was not French china. But it was so nicked, cracked and begrimed that it would have been a little difficult to tell just of what material it was composed. And the supper was more plentiful than choice. A huge mass of cold corned beef occupied the center, from which each guest did his own carving. Bread, butter and potatoes formed the chief remaining constituents of the meal, while a massive iron pot steamed with coffee, or some such beverage.

At the head of the table sat old Smudge, his bleared eyes surveying with cunning looks the faces of his unprepossessing guests.

They were a half-dozen in all, ill-favored creatures enough, one with a huge wen under his eye, another with an ulcerated sore upon his arm, while the remainder were affected in other distressing ways, and all dressed in distractingly ragged attire, until they seemed an extraordinary coterie of beggars.

At the foot of the table sat Tim, the companion of Rusty Mike on his recent murderous expedition. He was dressed more respectably than the others, but had an uncanny, hangdog air, and an inability to look any one in the eye that was not all in his favor.

The meal was succeeded by the production of flasks of whisky, and by long pipes charged with strong tobacco, and very soon the air became filled with the nasty wreaths and pungent odors of tobacco smoke.

"I hopes my boys ish injoying theirselves," remarked old Smudge, casting a paternal look down the table. "I very mooch likes to haf you all happy."

"I expect so," growled the man with the wen, from behind his pipe. "You're a nice, com'able old skinflint, as ought to've been brung up fer a preacher."

"Him a preacher!" exclaimed a wooden-legged, squint-eyed chap. "Why there aren't a text in the Bible that he wouldn't have twisted 'round to prove the devil is a gentleman."

"The rascally old scape-gallows!" cried a third, as he helped himself liberally to whisky. "He ought to belong to the Anter-deluvian Moral S'ciety."

"Dat ish right, boys," remarked old Smudge, rubbing his hands and smiling as if he had just heard some most complimentary remarks. "I like to she you haf your leetle jokes. Won't you shmoke, Mr. Timothy? Dat is goot tobac."

"Don't keer if I do smother a pipe," and Tim proceeded to fill the bowl of a pipe.

The door opened and a new person entered, no less an individual than Beau Bink, the pickpocket exquisite. Waving his hand with airy grace, he greeted the assemblage:

"Good-evening, gentlemen. Hope you're enjoying yourselves. How de do, Mr. Smudge. Yes, I don't care if I do indulge. That sartainly does look inviting."

Coolly helping himself to a knife he proceeded to cut a generous slice from the mass of meat yet remaining.

"Mebbe you'd best wait till you're axed," growled the man with the wen, with an evil leer.

"Asked," repeated Beau, with his mouth crammed with the beef. "Now you dry up, Topheavy. When Mr. Smudge gits too mean to invite a friend to take a slice of cold meat then I'll lose my faith in human nature."

"Correck," said the old rogue, with a pleased rubbing of his palms. "Der's noppody like bedder to she his frien's enjoy de'rselvcs. Try der whisky, Mr. Bink."

"Ain't much given to indulge," replied Beau, with his airy smile. "But seeing as it's a special occasion—"

He finished his speech with a wave of the hand, and the pouring out of a generous portion.

The strange-looking group around the table smoked on, looking at him with lowering eyes, as if they did not quite relish his intrusion.

Suddenly a bell that hung in one corner of the room rung with three sharp peals, continuing to jingle while the old host sprung to his feet so suddenly as to upset his chair. He shuffled quickly to the door.

"Be back soon, shentlemen," he remarked, as he passed out.

"Seems to be in a hurry," ventured Beau Bink.

"Dunno as it's none o' your business, if he is," grumbled the man with the wen, who seemed to have an invincible antipathy to the exquisite.

Tim rose, laid his pipe on the table, and walked about as if to stretch his limbs. There was a peculiar look upon his face.

"Calk'late I'll stroll out for a walk," he remarked. "Ain't had a breath of fresh air these six hours."

And he, too, left the room.

"Looks as if there's something up," ventured Beau, with a wink around the table.

"S'pose ther's somethin' up," growled Topheavy. "If you come spyin' 'bout here there'll be somethin' down too. What you got to say, fellers, 'bout this chap with the high-toned collar? Do we want his comp'ny?"

"Not much."

"Then let's dock him, while old Smudge is away."

Beau started up with alarm, dropping his pipe, which crashed into a hundred fragments on the floor.

Looking nervously around him he made a hasty dash for the door. But the others were too quick, particularly the wooden-legged man, who backed himself up against the portal and confronted the fugitive with a mocking smile.

"There ain't no admission out that way, Mr. Bink," said this fellow. "And I've a notion that these gemmen have business with you."

Beau trembled and groaned as he looked at the circle of grinning faces that surrounded him, more like the visages of wild beasts than of civilized beings.

He gazed distractedly around, his eyes dilated with terror. He then made a dart at the most open point in the circle, seeking to break through. But his effort was vain. Two strong hands grasped his trembling shoulders, two evil faces pushed themselves, with leering eyes, almost into his,

Meanwhile, a conversation was going on in the outer room. Tim's exercise had not taken him far; it ended in a point where he found old Smudge and Rusty Mike in earnest conversation.

"If you'll 'schuse me, shentlemen, I'll take a look in der schop," said the former, as Tim came up; and the threadbare old rogue shuffled away, his long coat almost dragging on the floor behind him.

"A jolly old cuss!" ejaculated Mike, following him with his eyes. "Shoot his rascally picture, he ain't worth a cocktail o' gin."

He looked around to Tim with a lowering and troubled gaze, keeping silent for several minutes, while the lesser villain shifted his eyes uneasily in every direction, and shuffled his feet impatiently.

"Do you know that you're a devilish uncom'fable twisty-eyed skunk?" broke out Mike, suddenly. "Why in the blue blazes can't ye look a man in the face, 'stead of runnin' yer eyes all over the ceilin' and walls like a cornered cat, blast you?"

"I calculate I wouldn't see nothin' wu'th the trouble, if I looked in your face," retorted Tim, with unusual spirit.

Mike burst into a laugh, but it had a grating, forced sound.

"Tell you what it is, Tim," he quickly rejoined, "ther's hell to pay. Look bere," and he glanced warily around and lowered his voice: "Ther's not enough water on that drowned gal. I've heered the most rantankerous bu'st-up 'bout her."

Tim started violently and turned ashy pale.

"The devil!" he cried. "Has the body come up? or has somebody took water and peached?"

He had to hold on to a chair to support himself, seeming utterly unnerved.

"By thunder, if I kin make it out," groaned Mike. "That keen little devil's cub they call Bob Rockett—why, blame my two eyes if ho didn't twit me to my face with drowndin' a woman! Dern me if it didn't take my breath away. And 'fore I could smash him, he scooted."

"Bob Rockett?" Tim's pallor was unearthly. "Shall we—" And he finished with a significant movement of the hand.

"No," gloomily. "There's more behind him. You'll have to pump him, Tim. You're a prime pump, and I ain't wu'th a picayune in that line. Mought be a chance shot, I s'pose, but it were aimed too straight. Pump him, Tim. Shoot me, if it don't make me feel uncom'fable."

Tim wiped his moist face, and managed to fix his eyes for a moment on that of his confederate.

"If we'd 'a' kept to our legitimate bizness," he began.

"Oh, blow all that!" interrupted Mike. "Don't you never begin diggin' up old gutters, if you don't want bad smells.—Now, there's that other job, Tim. That's more to the p'int. I've had the plate spotted, and it's solid and heavy. That crib's got to be cracked, my boy."

Tim looked up with more assurance.

"That's my line of goods," he averred. "I'm on hand. But what's the lay?"

"Thought fu'st of gittin' a boy to shin over the transom," replied Mike. "But boys is allers duberous. Guess I'd best take a squint myself at the premises."

While the conversation proceeded old Smudge had taken a wary glance around the store. Trying the bolt to see that everything was secure, he re-entered the hall, and dragged his slow way up-stairs toward the room in which he had left his tenants.

"What ailsh der poys?" he asked himself, as the sound of a peculiar uproar came to his ears. "Dey ish sich oncommon playful poys," and a look of deep malignity came into the old rogue's face.

The noise changed, as he approached, to a bustling shuffle, with a sort of choking, spluttering sound. He paused an instant at the door, listening. Then he pushed it open and entered.

A strange sight met his eyes.

The most striking feature of this was that the group of invalids seemed to have been suddenly cured of their various disorders. The huge wen which had disfigured the face of Topheavy had disappeared. The wooden-legged man was now standing on two as sound limbs as one would wish to see, while his discarded leg was kicked across the room. The sore had disappeared from the arm of a third, only solid, clean, healthy flesh remaining.

It was an extraordinary metamorphosis, but one which did not appear to surprise the old host, whose attention was attracted by another portion of the scene.

In fact, poor Beau Bink was in trouble. A large wooden bucket, two-thirds full of water, sat in the center of the floor, and over this the poor devil was suspended, head downward, in the hands of his stalwart foes, who were dipping him up and down with clockwork regularity, burying his head in the water at every dip, and then lifting him feet foremost, choking and spluttering like a half-drowned man.

Nor was this the whole of their torturing operations. Two others of the party were engaged, the one with an empty tobacco pipe, the other with the coffee-pot, pouring the hot beverage into the bowl of the pipe, until it ran from the stem in a smoking stream on the soles of his bared feet.

An occasional howl, and a fierce kicking and struggling, marked Beau's objection to this proceeding, but he was held too tight and at too great a disadvantage to escape from his tormentors.

"Here's corned beef and whisky fer him," cried Topheavy, as he soused him down.

"And here's coffee and pipes," said the knave with the coffee-pot, as he continued to pour the hot liquid.

A sudden, violent squirm, and Beau slipped from the hands of his tormentors to the floor. With hoarse laughs they sought to seize him again, but he darted across the room and caught up the discarded wooden leg. The others advanced on him in a body. He brandished his weapon, his eyes flashing with fury.

And now it seemed as if a desperate fray was about to be fought, for the victim was armed with the strength of madness. But the voice

of old Smudge broke upon the momentary silence.

"What ish der madder here?" he asked in a stern tone. "What's you doin' mit my frient, Mr. Bink?"

The crowd of assailants turned at this voice, and shrunk back from their victim.

"Only a little fun," explained Topheavy. "A trifle of amusement to settle our suppers."

"Amusement, hey?" The old man's face lowered with anger. "Wouldn't pe amusement if I wash to kick you all out, hey? Dirty peggars!"

The mendicants were evidently afraid of their host. They shrunk away from their victim, with a reluctant movement, as if they were so many hyenas robbed of their prey. Topheavy hunted for a minute on the floor, and then picked up an unpleasant, semi-globular mass. It was his wen, which he had lost in the struggle. The others seemed engaged in a similar search.

"Dirty peggars!" repeated old Smudge, disdainfully. Then with a sudden change of tone, he continued: "Nice poys. Fond of der fun, dey are. Likes ter shmoko and kick up. Ish you hurt, Mr. Bink?"

The coffee-pot, which had been standing open, had lost much of its heat, yet Beau's feet were of the color of boiled lobsters, as he attempted to put on his shoes. Not a word, in answer, came from him. He limped painfully to the door, a desperately bedraggled specimen of humanity.

Reaching there he turned and shook his fist at the crew of mendicants.

"You've had your turn. I'll have mine yet," he hissed.

Then, with a sudden thought, he changed to the right hand the wooden leg, which he had still held in his left, and hurled it with savage fury at the knot of his tormentors.

The aim proved a sure one. The weapon struck the owner of the leg squarely in the forehead and knocked him senseless to the floor.

The others rushed to the door, out of which Beau had quickly slipped. But old Smudge stood with his back to it, saying:

"Nice poys! Jist git pack to yer pipes, and don't lesh hear any more of dish fun." And the old fellow's eyes scowled unpleasantly from under their heavy brows.

CHAPTER XI.

BOB'S NEW DEPARTURE.

"S'POSE I've got nothing else to do but to watch you, you lazy young hound?" cried the foreman of the rivet factory to Bob Rockett, who was taking life remarkably easy at his machine.

"You needn't trouble yerself to watch me," replied Bob, impudently. "I'll watch myself, and charge nothin' fer the job."

"What do you mean, sirrah? I'll slather your ears if you try your smart tongue on me. Go to your work, now, or get out, whichever you please."

"If it's what I please," answered Bob, "I don't please to do neither."

"You won't, eh?" cried the foreman, exas-

perated by the boy's impudent leer. "Blame your eyes, we'll soon see who is boss here!" He dealt Bob a back-handed slap on the ear that almost leveled that young gentleman to the floor.

The boy's savage temper was in a flame instantly. Catching up the keen tool that lay beside him he made a stroke at the foreman which might have had a very serious effect, had the latter not leaped hastily back. In doing so he struck an obstruction with his foot and fell prostrate to the floor.

The boy, still infuriated, raised his arm as if with intent to fling his dangerous weapon at the prostrate man, but his arm was caught by another of the workmen, and the tool wrested from his grasp.

"You little spit-fire!" exclaimed the workman. "Don't you see that you came within an ace of killing the man?"

"I don't keer a cent," growled the boy, savagely. "Didn't he hit me?"

"Hold him!" cried the foreman, struggling to his feet. "I'll settle him!"

But the boy, with a quick jerk, tore himself loose from the careless grasp of the workman.

"Don't you come foolin' 'round me ag'in," he yelled. "'Cause I'm Bob Rockett, I am; and I won't let no man 'cept my dad play on me. I ain't goin' to list another tool in this yere factory, you kin jist bet on that, and I don't keer nothin' fer old Jones, nor any of his barkers."

He was backing off as he spoke, toward a window in the rear. He now turned, sprung upon a box, and from that to the window-sill. The next instant he had leaped to the ground outside, disappearing from the view of the astonished workmen.

"If that boy don't end at the gallows, then I'm no judge," remarked the foreman.

But Bob, heedless of this uncomplimentary opinion, walked away with a gloomy face.

"It was bound to come to it," he muttered. "It's been a-workin' up. But, oh, Joseph! won't dad be rarin' mad! He'll skin me, sure! If I can only hide it from him. Raise cash somehow and play it off fer wages. It won't be no harder nor playin' truant at school. If I kin hit the cash. Let me see. Ther's ways of doin' it. By thunder, if I kin only track Rusty Mike, I mought hit the mark on that murder biz'ness, and mak' a ten 'strike right thar."

But we must, for the present, follow the fortunes of Rusty Mike. That individual was in anything but a heavenly humor. The strange hint he had received from the boy had produced an impression upon him which he could not throw off.

His wife was not very comfortable under this mental worry of her lord and master. He snarled and swore with a dogged fierceness that kept the woman in a constant dread.

"Dern it all, Sal, ye'r' enough to give a saint the blue devils!" he snarled, in answer to some trifling observation. "D'y'e s'pose a man ain't got no nerves that ye'r' all the time a-pickin' at him like a rat at a piece o' cheese? Blast me if I ain't gottin' sick of it!"

And rising he flung his pipe furiously to the floor, breaking it into fragments. Dashing his hat on his head, he stalked noisily from his

room, slamming the door fiercely behind him, and leaving his wife in a state of utter astonishment at this outbreak.

Mike stamped on down the street, his eyes glaring to right and left, as if in search of some object on which to vent his spleen. He had gone on in this mood for some distance, when he happened to lift his eyes to the level of the second floor window of the opposite houses. A violent start, a curse, a trembling of fear came over him. For Rusty Mike, in mid-afternoon, in bright sunlight, had seen a ghost.

The face which for an instant had appeared, inclosed between two curtains, and then had disappeared, leaving the curtains draped over the window, he knew it too well. He had seen it before for a moment only, at night, by the dim glow of a street lamp, but it was too deeply engraved upon his memory to be forgotten. Had the sea given up its dead? It was the face of the drowned woman!

A nervous tremor shook Mike's sturdy limbs, as he walked on. His embrowned face grew pallid. He was too much shaken up to notice the number of the house or even the street he was in. He felt sure it was a specter he had seen, and had all his ordinary wit driven out of him by terror.

There was another thing which he did not notice. This was that the boy, Bob Rockett, lounged on carelessly behind him, keeping him in sight, though apparently paying no heed to his movements.

Yet Bob had a decided object in view. He had to earn his week's wages before Saturday night, or he might be interviewed by Dad Rockett and his strap, of which he stood in wholesome dread. And it seemed to him that the track of Rusty Mike might prove a highly profitable one.

Mike became more assured as he got away from the locality of that dreaded vision. It might be a mistake after all, he argued. A sort of cheating of the eye by the mind. That woman's face was in his memory, he thought, and had somehow forced its image upon his eye. He must be growing weak-minded to let such a thing scare him.—He walked on more sturdily.

His path took him far up-town, and into one of the handsomer streets of that locality. Bob continued upon his track. Here the boy noticed that he was joined by a companion, a ragged, disreputable fellow, with an enormous wen upon his right cheek, below his eye.

At length the man with the wen pointed to one of these elegant mansions.

"That's the crib," he remarked. "It's got my private mark aside the area door."

"And ye'r' all squar' with the gal?" asked Mike.

"You bet," returned Topheavy, for it was he. "Ther's cold bits there enough to start a second-hand boardin'-house. And I've struck some other little pickin's unbeknownst to the gal. They're the carelessest folks goin'. And lashin's of silver stuff."

"Let's prospect," said Mike. "Ye know I'm a poor friend of yourn, jest from Arkansaw, and hain't had bit nor sup fer twa hull day."

"Be keerful," replied Topheavy, looking at

him critically. "You ain't used to the trade, and mought overplay it."

Walking forward with all the boldness of a habitual beggar, he rung the bell with that thundering peal which only a huckster or a mendicant thinks of giving.

Bob watched them closely from the other side of the street, in some doubts as to their movements. After their disappearance he crossed over, and leaned upon the railing, trying to see through the curtained window, and listening with all his ears with hope to catch a scrap of conversation.

After he had been here a minute or two the front door opened, and a well-dressed, handsome gentleman emerged, attended to the door by a beautiful young lady. She smiled softly as he shook her extended hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Delorme," she said, in low, mellow tones.

"Good-by," he replied, more coldly.

He descended the steps and brushed past the lad, who was leaning upon the railing.

She followed him for a minute with a peculiar expression in her eyes, then turned and re-entered the house. Had Bob been able to see through stone walls he would have perceived that she walked toward the rear stairs, and descended to the basement story.

Meanwhile the two men who had made their entrance under pretense of hunger, appeared to have been highly successful in their appeal to charity. The cook, a burly, middle-aged woman, particularly ill-favored, was laughing heartily at Topheavy, who seemed to have quite won her heart by his conversational powers.

As for Rusty Mike, he was regaling himself on a plentiful spread of cold meat and bread and butter which the girl had laid out for him.

"I'll never forgit yer charity," he said, with an affected whine, "but if it aren't too much to ask, my purty lass, a trifle of pepper would be a monstrous help to the meat."

The girl, with a simper of pleasure at his compliment, left the kitchen in search of the pepper-box. Mike instantly rose and made some hasty manipulations about the door, listening warily to her footsteps.

He was seated again when she reappeared. But he had just slipped a wax mold into his pocket, and was examining, with critical eye, a silver spoon which had been carelessly left upon the table.

"Here's the pepper, my good man. And I hope you're making a hearty meal. Two whole days without a bite! No wonder you're looking thin!"

At this monment the young lady appeared at the kitchen door.

"Hannah," she called out, a vexed look crossing her face on seeing the character of the girl's company.

Mike was so seated that, by a slight movement of the head, he could see the lady's face. He started so violently as to drop the pepper-box.

This noise drew the lady's attention. She darted a quick glance toward him. But every particle of color left her lips on seeing his face, and she leaned against the doorway for support,

All this by-play had passed so quickly as not to be observed by the others.

"Will ye 'scuse me?" asked Mike, starting up as she was about to withdraw. "But does yer ladyship set any store by jewelry? I've got some'at as I've brought all the way from California, and bein's I'm hard up I'd sell it cheap, dog cheap, my lady."

"I do not care to see it," she hastily replied.

"Yer ladyship'd better," and Mike's eyes had a threatening glare.

She hesitated a moment.

"Oh, very well. I will look at it then," she announced. "Bring it here, where we will have a better light."

A look of satisfaction came upon Mike's face, as he followed her from the room shutting the door behind him.

She continued to walk on, leading him upstairs, and into the main hall.

"We are out of hearing now," she sternly said. "I wish to know what brings you here."

"I cum by chance," he answered. "But ther' ain't many sich lucky chances," a lowering smile marking his face.

"What do you want?"

"Money."

"You have been paid your price."

"All right, yer ladyship. But that's all gone, and a poor devil like me is got to have money to live on, ye know."

"Ah! you would black-mail me then?"

"Oh, no ma'am, nothin' so unpleasant. But I'm desp'rat poor, yer ladyship."

"And suppose I let you remain poor?"

"It moughtn't turn out very comf'able for yerself," he answered, with a threatening look. "I ain't much given to peach, but there's no tellin' what a poor devil mought be druv to. That drownded gal mought get a-weighin' on my conscience, which is very delicate."

"Very well, my man," she sternly replied, "you have shown your object now. But unluckily, you are mistaken in your person. I do not fear you and will not be blackmailed by you, for I know you value your miserable life too much to risk my safety."

She paused a moment and then resumed as from a sudden recollection.

"Besides, I begin to fear that you played me a trick. She is still alive."

Her lips quivered despite her effort to appear composed.

"Alive?" cried Mike, starting. "By hell's fire. I saw her ghost to-day! Fer all that she's dead as dead kin be. The ocean's swallowed her, and I'll never give her up ag'in!"

"Yes, with a hook," came a youthful voice. "She's no more dead than any of us yere, and I'm the chap as knows it."

With a violent start they turned, and beheld Bob Rockett, who had entered through the front door, which had been carelessly left on a crack.

CHAPTER XII.

BOB SHOWS HIS HAND.

MARIE ORMISTON'S remark that she believed that Mike had played a trick upon her, takes us a little back in our story for its origin.

We have already given an account of the first

step in her set purpose to make George Delorme the victim of her charms, and to win the reward of her crime in the love of this man for whom she had conceived such an overmastering passion.

The effect then produced upon him had persisted. Though he still continued to love his lost betrothed, and made every possible effort to unravel the mystery of her disappearance, yet the warm sympathy of this beautiful girl in his grief was becoming dangerously pleasant and threatened in time to make him forget his love and his grief, and yield himself body and soul to the siren, who had so skillfully set her nets for him.

He was seated in her boudoir a half-hour before the events narrated in the last chapter, listening to her soft tones, while they had drawn dangerously near to each other upon the sofa.

"And have all your efforts been in vain?" she asked, in a cooing voice. "Has not a clew, or a shadow of evidence appeared?"

He gave a slight start, and a remembrance crossed his mind.

"What made me forget it?" he asked himself. "Yes, I have a slight clew. It may prove a most important one, but it looks toward some fate more serious than I wished to let myself believe. I tried to convince myself that a sudden sickness, or perhaps some strange whim, might explain her disappearance. But this looks toward violence and robbery."

"What is it?" she asked in a sinking voice, her pallor passing off very well as the result of sympathy and deep interest.

"It is this," he said; "I found it to-day exposed for sale in a jeweler's window."

He withdrew his fingers from his vest pocket. They held a piece of jewelry, a gold breastpin, containing in its center a solitaire diamond of medium size.

"It is Grace's pin," he remarked. "I gave it to her myself."

Marie was shivering as with an ague. She drew away from him, her eyes fixed with a kind of terrified fascination upon the pin.

"I have not yet put the officers on the track," he continued. "But they may trace it up to important developments."

Marie recovered her composure by a violent effort.

"It is hers," she half-whispered. "But—but—she did not wear it on that day. She wore only a plain traveling-dress. I am sorry to destroy your hopes, but this must be the work of some servant. This pin has been stolen and sold to the jeweler."

"Are you sure she did not wear it?"

"Quite sure. I am sorry, but you will gain no clew by seeking to trace that jewel."

"But you may be mistaken. It will not do to leave any chance untried."

"I am not mistaken, sir." Her tone had a slight ring of anger. "Excuse me, but it is not pleasant to have you doubt my word."

"Doubt your word, Marie?" he looked at her in surprise. "What do you mean? I had no thought of such a thing."

"It seemed so, at least."

He rose to his feet.

"I must be going now," he said, quietly. "I

am sorry that you have misunderstood me. But I think you will soon see that I must try every clew, even if it seem an idle hope. After what you have said I have no hope of good results from this jewel, but it is my duty to find whence it came."

She had recovered her softness of manner when bidding him good-by at the door, but he could not avoid showing some coldness in his deportment.

It may be well imagined that on hearing the sudden declaration of Bob Rockett that her victim was still living a cold tremor passed through Marie Ormiston's heart. Fearful suggestions of this nature had so suddenly accumulated to overthrow her security. The finding of the jewel by George Delorme, the statement of Mike that he had seen the ghost of her victim, and now this definite and positive assertion. Her face was of an ashen hue, her lips bloodless and quivering, as she turned to see from whom came that startling statement. And Mike, hardened villain as he was, could not avoid some show of alarm and terror.

Bob stood leaning against the door, his shrewd young face keenly observant of their evidences of emotion.

"It's you, hey? you cursed little rat-dog!" exclaimed Mike, with a threatening step forward. "Do you want me to throttle you, blast yer?"

"That wouldn't put the gal outer the way ag'in," Bob coolly responded. "Ther's no two ways 'bout it. The gal isn't drownded, and that's the whole story."

Mike looked at his lady confederate, in whose face an expression of bold decision had replaced her momentary terror.

"What do you mean, boy?" she coolly asked.

Bob's sharp eyes were fixed with a keen glance upon her features.

"I mean the gal as Rusty Mike flung overboard, sewed up in a bag, and as you hired him to. But she ain't no more drownded nor I am. I know jist where she's hidin', and I know that she's goin' to make these yere diggin's hot fur the pair of ye, 'fore long."

"Not dead!" repeated Marie, with a gesture of surprise. "Why, she was dead before she left here. You seem to have a strange idea, my boy, that there was an effort to drown some one. This man was employed to throw overboard a corpse, which we had good reasons for disposing of in that manner. What gave you the ridiculous fancy that it was a live person?"

"'Cause she don't walk like a corpse; nor she don't talk like one," answe s Bob sturdily.

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed Marie, passing her hand over her brow with a bewildered gesture. "Could we have been mistaken? Were there any signs of life?"

This question was addressed to Mike, who had stood during this brief colloquy staring at her in stupid wonder.

"Dead as a red herrin', ma'am," he asserted, recovering his wits.

"If it is as this boy says, something must be done. We must find some means to get her to the asylum.—The poor lady was insane," she continued, addressing Bob. "She obtained poison, and was supposed to have committed

suicide, for she was found apparently dead. For certain family reasons we tried to dispose of the body in the way you know of. It is fortunate, indeed, if the immersion in cold water has brought her back to life, and if she has escaped from the danger of death by drowning. But she must not be left at liberty. She will try some other means of self-destruction. Where has she been taken to, my lad?"

Mike's face was a picture as he listened to this skillful web of lies. He turned to conceal the involuntary grin of admiration for her talents that came upon his features.

As for the boy, it was not easy to decide whether he was deceived or not. His countenance remained impassive as he continued to look the speaker in the face.

"I know," he briefly replied.

"But she must be brought back among her friends. Or taken to the asylum. Will you not help us to recover the poor demented woman? She is not to be trusted for a minute."

"Tell you what it is," burst out Bob, "I've got to have some cash, or a solid hiding from my dad; one or t'other; and that blamed soon. Now what is it goin' to be wu'th to tell you where this crazy gal is?"

"I will pay you well for it," answered Marie, with a smile of satisfaction. "Here is money now. I will give you more after you have revealed her place of concealment."

"Ten dollars," said Bob, looking with unconcealed pleasure on the bank bill. "Tell you what, make it a hundred, and I'm yer boss."

"A hundred," repeated Marie, with an affection of surprise.

"Say a hundred, and I'll take a hand in the game," repeated Bob. "She ain't afear'd o' me, and she mought be of the rest of ye."

"Very well. I would give even more to be sure of her safety. The money shall be yours, boy, the moment you show us where she is."

"Honor bright?" asked Bob, doubtfully.

"You can trust me," she curtly rejoined.

Ten minutes afterward Bob Rockett was walking alone down Fifth avenue, his eyes fixed upon the mansions in that stately street as if he was mentally deciding which of them he would purchase when he came into his fortune. One hundred dollars! It seemed like a million to his excited imagination.

But for all this hoped-for wealth he was not quite easy in his mind.

"Needn't tell me," he said to himself. "That crazy dodge don't sell this chicken. I'm afear'd it'll be worse than drowndin' next time. A hundred dollars's a big pull, and she'd been gone anyhow only fer me. But—"

A shudder ran through his young frame. The thought that this waⁿt murder came like a dark shadow of terror upon him.

"No, no!" he mentally ejaculated, "not if it was a million. I'e'me see. Ain't there some way now o' fingerin' that hundred and savin' the lady both? S'pose I post the perlise?—Moses! I've got it now. I mought tell 'em to wait till they've got her in the kerriage, and then salt the whole set. That's the dodge. Ain't paid Rusty Mike yet fur that kick, anyhow."

He walked on more and more slowly. Another

thought had come into his mind. If this lady was worth so much to one party was she worth nothing to the other? If her enemies would pay so much to know where to find her, would her friends pay nothing?

"Wonder if ther's been no reward offered?" he asked himself. "I'm a blind fool I didn't think of that sooner. Got a half notion to go to the *Herald* office and ax 'em squar' out."

At this moment he observed two persons before him whose faces gave a new current to his thoughts. One of them was the young gentleman whom he had recently seen leaving the door of Miss Ormiston's residence. The other was an older person, with gray whiskers, and a dignified, staid countenance. There was a striking resemblance in his features to those of Grace Garland, which the sharp-eyed boy did not fail to observe.

These two persons were standing in earnest conversation.

"You give me new life," exclaimed George Delorme. "I feared the worst. She writes that she is safe and well?"

"Yes. But she does not say where she is, or what has happened." There was a ring of vexation in the voice. "Grace was always given to such foolish love of mystery."

"She is concealing herself then! We must find her. Yet I have had all the police vainly seeking." He spoke sadly.

"The perlice? You don't s'pose they're any 'count, do ye?" came a boyish voice at their elbows.

They looked around in surprise, to see a ragged, dwarfish, old-faced boy, who stood regarding them with the greatest assurance.

"Aren't you a friend of the young lady that's missin'?" asked Bob.

"Yes, yes!"

"And aren't you her father?"

"Why, certainly. Is it possible that this boy can know where she is?" You shall be well rewarded, my lad, if you can give us any information."

"Weren't ther' a reward put in the papers?" asked Bob again.

"Yes. One thousand dollars for any information," answered George, hastily. "It shall be yours if you can tell us where to find this lost lady."

Bob stood silent for a minute, as if sunk in deep reflection. Then he again spoke:

"S'pose a chap of my size had a small fortune as he didn't want to lay out all at once; could ye rec'mend any good 'vestment? Some way as folks have to make cash fetch in cash?"

"Yes. But what has that to do with the question?"

"Only that I 'spect to have somethin' to 'vest, and mighty soon. To the tune of a thousand or tharaways."

"Then you know—"

"I ken jist put my finger on that missin' gal at any minute," answered Bob, with great dignity of manner.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OPEN DAY ABDUCTION.

A DARK look was upon Grace Garland's face as she sat by the window in Mrs. Essex's hum-

ble apartment, gazing listlessly into the busy street below.

It was gloom that was full of sadness; a sorrow that was tinged with despair.

"I dreamed not that it could come to this," she faintly murmured. "That George Delorme could so soon forget me, and yield himself to the charms of another! And that other Marie Ormiston, whom I fear, I dread—"

She became silent, placing her hands over her face as if to shut out a frightful vision.

"I fondly fancied I had no enemies," she continued. "Yet she accompanied me that fatal day, she alone. And now she is seeking to win from me him I love. Is it for this that I was thrown into the midnight stream? And George, was he—could—he—no, no, I cannot believe that—it would be too terrible! No, he has been taken captive by the charms of this false woman. I have long distrusted her. Have I now gained the reward of my concealment, in finding that my professed friend was my attempted destroyer?"

She looked again from the window, her forehead resting against the glass. There was a nervous twitching in her fingers. Evidently she was not at rest under the information gained by the detective she had employed.

"If my father were only returned," she mused. "I dare not trust myself from this concealment until I have his protection. If she knew I had escaped her plans I would be in deadly peril."

A carriage that was moving slowly along the street stopped before the door of the house. Two men were on the box who got down and moved inward toward the house. At the same moment a boy came along the street whose face seemed to her to have something familiar in its lines. She, however, gave but a glance at these incidents, being too absorbed in her thoughts to heed what was going on outside.

Behind her Mrs. Essex was moving about in her usual bustling fashion, while Paul was curled up upon an easy-chair, diligently studying a school lesson.

"There, I fancy I've got the best of that grammar now," he ejaculated, throwing the book with a careless fling upon the table. "I will go out for a little run before supper, mother."

"Very well, Paul, if you do not stay too late. Be back in an hour."

Seizing his hat, Paul burst with all the impetuosity of a school-boy from the room, and descended the stairs three steps at a time, reaching bottom in a moment of time.

He stopped an instant at the door, surprised at the unusual spectacle of a carriage standing before that humble domicile. Two men, their faces turned from him, were conversing in low tones on the pavement. At a short distance from them stood Bob Rockett, in a lounging attitude, a look of curious anxiety and indecision upon his face.

"Hello, Paul!" exclaimed Bob, "which way now?"

"Only goin' to meet some of the boys for a bit of sport."

Without asking Bob to accompany him Paul hastened away.

"Stir up, now," said one of the two men turning sharply toward him. "What are you standing there for?"

It was the voice of Rusty Mike.

"This is the house," answered the boy, with a slight show of hesitation.

He entered the doorway, and moved with a lagging step toward the stairs.

The men pushed impatiently past him.

"Which door is it?"

"First to the right, second floor."

They walked rapidly up the creaking stairs, leaving the boy at the bottom, his eyes gazing uneasily up the street.

"I do hope Paul will get enough of play some time," remarked Miss Essex. "It is queer how fond boys are of making a noise and getting themselves tired."

"I do not think it very strange," smiled Grace. "You and I were once fond of it ourselves."

"But not in the way boys are. They—Who's that?" as a fumbling was heard at the door.

It opened and two men entered. A glance at them, and a shiver of dread ran through Grace Garland's frame.

"What do you want here?" asked Mrs. Essex, in her sharpest tones. "You've mistook the place, my men."

"Not much," returned Rusty Mike, his eyes dilating as he looked at Grace. "I've a sorter notion as there's no mistake."

"What are you after?" asked Mrs. Essex again, facing them angrily.

"We're arter this poor woman," answered Mike, with a sort of whimper in his effort to show concern. "Poor thing! her parents has sent us with a kerridge to fetch her home."

"Oh! what does he mean?" cried Grace, her face full of dread.

"Won't you be quiet now?" whispered the other man in Mrs. Essex's ear. "Ain't you found out that the creature's crazy? We're only keepers from the 'sylum, as hev been sent for her."

The little woman looked from one face to the other with a startled expression in her eyes. Then she fixed her glance upon Grace, who was holding to her chair with a nervous clutch, her lips ashy pale, a look of terror in her eyes.

"It is not so!" cried Mrs. Essex, with a sudden movement toward the door. "You're a pair of villains, and if you don't leave I'll scream for help."

A savage glare came into Mike's eyes.

"Settle her, Tim!" he said.

In an instant the lesser villain had caught her by the throat and forced her back into a chair. Despite her struggles he proceeded to bind and gag her, being apparently well provided with materials for the purpose.

At the first sign of violence Grace sprung from her chair. Her first movement was toward Mrs. Essex, as if to assist her against her foes. Her next was toward the widow, with intent to throw it up and call for help.

Ere she could reach it she was seized by the strong hands of Mike, who drew her violently back. A faint scream broke from her lips. Ere she could repeat it with more energy, her

captor had forced a handkerchief upon her mouth and nostrils, while a peculiar sweetish odor disseminated itself throughout the room.

A gasp; a slight struggle; she felt her senses going from her. She made a desperate effort to tear herself loose, but he only pressed the handkerchief more firmly upon her nostrils, holding her with an iron grasp.

A moment more and she staggered and would have fallen but for his strong arm.

"Quick, Tim, is yourn safe?"

"In a minute," answered Tim.

"Hurry like blazes! The gal's keeled over! Poor critter! we must git her home to her parents at once!"

"All right now," said Tim, as he tightened another knot.

Mrs. Essex sat in perfect helplessness, firmly bound to the chair, while her mouth was bandaged so tightly that she could scarcely breathe, and her eyes seemed as if they would start from her head on beholding her guest torn from her room in open day, and she unable to render any aid or to give the alarm.

The door closed behind the villains, bearing between them their insensible captive.

"Poor thing, she has fainted," said Mike, on reaching the foot of the stairs, where one or two passers looked on with surprise at this unusual spectacle.

"Give her air," remarked Tim, moving quickly forward. "It's a dangerous fever, and I hope none of us will catch it."

The lookers-on drew back in alarm.

The boy confederate of the villains stood by the carriage door and flung it open as they approached. In an instant they had lifted their captive inside.

"Poor thing," exclaimed Mike, feelingly. "She'll soon come to, with the air."

He sought to close the carriage-door, but Bob stood there with his hand extended inside.

"Quick as thunder with the spondulicks," he whispered, in an excited tone. "If you don't pony up I'll let out."

A small paper roll was thrust into his hand within. He drew it out and saw that it was composed of bank notes.

"All right," he exclaimed, slamming the carriage-door. "Drive on."

All this had passed so quickly that the few observers had not yet got rid of their first impression. It seemed like the placing of a sick lady in a carriage.

"My bargain is out with that party," said Bob, to himself, as he looked anxiously along the street. "Now for the others. Where the saints are they?"

The carriage had already started. There was no sign of what he was looking for. A show of fear and anxiety came upon his face. Turning, he walked hastily after the carriage, still looking over his shoulder.

It turned a corner, shutting out the view of the street they were in. Bob thrust the roll of notes into his pocket and began to run. Another corner, and another were turned. Suddenly he found himself face to face with Paul Essex, who was moving leisurely in the opposite direction.

Bob grasped him violently by the arm, his face pale and haggard-looking.

"Run like lightnin'!" he cried. "Straight home! Ther's the devil to pay! You'll find men there with a kerridge! Tell 'em to turn up Canal street and drive like mad. I'll keep 'em in sight."

He was off at full speed, leaving Paul the picture of astonishment. It took a minute for the thought to work its way through his head that some serious disaster had occurred. Then, turning, he ran homeward like a young deer.

Meanwhile Bob was gaining on the carriage, which had met with some obstruction in the crowded street.

Paul reached home breathless and frightened. A carriage stood before the door. Two men, with scared faces, had just rushed from the stairs onto the pavement. They stood looking distractedly around them.

"Are you after some one?" asked Paul, with breathless haste.

"Yes! yes! Have you seen them? Can you direct us?"

"They have turned up Canal street. You must drive like mad."

"Jump on the seat, my boy. You may help us."

In an instant Paul and the two men sprung into an open carriage, the younger man grasped the reins, and the mettled horses started at a quick pace up the narrow street.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN SHARP PURSUIT.

THE two gentlemen were pale with anxiety and dread, as the carriage made its way through the contracted street. Paul pointed out which way to drive in order to reach the point where he had seen Bob Rockett, but rapid progress was not easy in those narrow and crowded thoroughfares.

"What does it all mean?" asked Paul, anxiously appealing to the gentlemen by his side. "Is there anything wrong?"

"An abduction, my lad. A young lady abducted in open day."

"From the house I saw you coming out of?" asked Paul, with breathless dread. "It wasn't Miss Garland?"

"Yes," replied the gentleman, with interest. "You know, then, that she was there, and that we are not on a false errand?"

"Of course she was there. That is my mother's house, and she was staying with us. Oh, sir! you don't say that they have stolen her away?—And my mother! Oh, let me down! Something may have happened to my mother."

"No, my boy, she is all right. They tied her, but we set her free."

"This is Canal street, sir. But it is pretty much crowded. Take that side, it's open there for half a block. They can't have much start."

Mr. Delorme, for it was he, was a skillful driver, and managed to guide his horses with much skill through the turmoil of rattling wagons and street cars, veering to right and left, and darting around corners and through cavities in the mass with a speed and daring that more than once risked the overturning of his vehicle.

Yet no signs appeared of the party whom they were pursuing. The street they were on debouched into Broadway. A policeman stood on the corner. Mr. Delorme checked his horses for an instant and called out to this person:

"Have you seen any carriage pass out this street in the last five minutes?"

"Yes. About three minutes ago. It turned into Broadway."

"Was there a boy running after it?" asked Paul.

"No. But there was a boy hanging on behind. A ragged little fellow."

"That's the chap," cried Paul, with satisfaction.

"Thanks!" said Mr. Delorme, as he turned horses into Broadway, up which he drove with much greater rapidity than he had been able to do in the crowded business thoroughfares.

But who can this boy be?" asked Mr. Garland, whose anxious face looked forward from the rear seat of the carriage.

"The boy?" answered Paul. "Why he's Bob Rockett, and he's just the fellow to hang on till the wheels go to pieces. Though I don't see how he got mixed into it."

"Bob Rockett?" repeated Mr. Garland.

"That's him. He's a little chap that loafed around our way. A regular little rascal and bully, too. He's tried to lick me more than once, but I guess I took the starch out of him. We ain't much of friends any more, 'cause my mother don't want me to go with him, and I don't like him myself too much."

A smile came upon Mr. Delorme's face at this condensed history of a boy's life.

"Why, he is the very boy who warned us of this abduction," he remarked. "We were delayed by an unlucky jam in the streets, and got there too late. The plucky little fellow is following the villains up."

"And he will hang on, too," replied Paul. "He's got plenty of pluck, if he is a little fight-cat. I suppose you know it was him that saved Miss Grace from drowning, and brought her to my mother's house?"

Here was a new revelation. The gentlemen looked at each other in surprise. They had heard nothing of this. They simply knew that she was concealed, but why, or through what peril she had passed, they were quite ignorant.

A few questions elicited the whole story, the attempted murder, the fortunate rescue, the purpose of Miss Garland's concealment, and Paul's own warm admiration of his mother's involuntary boarder.

"But there was a valuable reward offered."

"Yes," Paul simply answered. "I saw it."

"And was it no inducement to you?"

"Miss Grace didn't want me to answer it, and so I didn't."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Mr. Delorme, with admiration. "That's not bad. And were all your young companions as self-denying as yourself? I fondly fancied that five thousand dollars would be a strong inducement."

"I wouldn't trust Bob and his cronies," Paul frankly admitted. "But they ain't much on reading, and I took mighty good care not to post them. I wasn't going back on Miss Grace."

"She will not go back on you, my boy," said the father, heartily.

During this conversation, which had had many breaks in the exigencies of their course, they had passed a considerable distance up the grand avenue.

It was here much less frequented by wheeled vehicles, and their progress became correspondingly rapid, the mettled horses leaping to the touch of the whip, and tearing up the avenue, till fire flew in a line of sparks from the clatter of their iron hoofs on the flinty stones.

More than once policemen ordered them to check their speed, and Mr. Delorme made a feint of trying to bring down his horses; yet the need was too urgent to make this more than a feint, and the fierce pursuit went on.

"Yet I fear they have thrown us," he remarked, with some uneasiness of tone. "They could not have looked for so sharp a chase. Had they kept to Broadway we should have overtaken them before now. They must have turned down some side street."

"In which case we can only trust to the wit of the boy," said Mr. Garland.

Paul said nothing. His eyes were fixed on a carriage just then turning the corner of a street at some distance in advance. There was no boy clinging to it, to be sure; but he saw something familiar in the short, stout form just then stepping from the street to the pavement close behind it.

"Pull up a little," he warned the driver, as they approached the corner.

Without asking why, Mr. Delorme obeyed. Paul's sharp young eyes looked keenly down the side street. The carriage was not far in advance. And there, on the pavement, following at a quick step, was the unmistakable figure of Bob Rockett.

"Good for our side!" exclaimed Paul, with enthusiasm. "There's the scout! There's the carriage! After them, sir; we'll save her yet!"

In a minute they had overtaken the boy, who was running in a sort of easy trot, with his eyes fixed on the fugitive carriage.

"Hello, Bob!" cried Paul. "Here you are! Jump up behin'! Ain't got time to stop!"

Bob shifted his eyes for a moment from his quarry, and took in the situation at a glance. In an instant more he took Paul's advice, ran at an angle toward the passing carriage, and caught it as it swung rapidly by.

With youthful agility he lifted himself into a secure position behind.

"That's them!" he cried, breathlessly. "They seen me, and whipped me off. Drive like sin and you'll catch 'em afore they could say Jack Robinson!"

Mr. Delorme was not long in obeying this advice. He touched the whip to his horses and whirled like an avalanche upon the fugitives, who showed no sign of having taken the alarm.

Less than a minute elapsed after Bob's information ere the carriages were side by side, the two men on the box of the foremost looking around with surprise upon this vehicle which had so suddenly overtaken them. Apparently they had no thought of pursuit,

"Stop there!" yelled Mr. Delorme, sternly. "Stop, or by Heaven, there will be dead men among you!"

He covered them with a pistol, throwing the reins into Paul's hands.

"Who are you, and what the blazes do you want?" roared Mike, whipping his horses.

"Halt, I say! I am not the man for you to play with, you cursed villain!"

"Shoot and be hanged!" yelled Mike, drawing a pistol in his turn. "That's a game two can play at."

His words were answered by the keen report of Mr. Delorme's weapon. With a cry of pain Tim dropped the reins. They fell on the horses' backs, while he grasped his bleeding right hand with the other.

The unchecked horses began to plunge, frightened by the keen report. But Bob Rockett had not been idle. At the first check to their speed he had let himself drop from the carriage, and was now at the heads of the uneasy horses, clutching boldly at their bits, and forcing their heads down, as he hung by a hand to each rein. A quick plunge and then they stopped, though quivering with fear.

"Let go, you hell-hound!" screamed Mike, firing point-blank at the boy.

But Bob was partly sheltered by the horses, and the bullet flew harmlessly past.

"You kicked me Rusty Mike," he cried back. "I told you then I'd be even with you."

All this had passed within a few seconds, hardly attracting attention in the quiet street, in which there was no person near at hand. The pistol-shots had been heard, but there was no sign of an officer, and only a few distant passers had turned in wonder at the unusual sound.

But, George Delorme's pistol-shot was followed by a rapid movement on his part. He sprung to the ground from his carriage, without waiting for it to halt, and ran quickly to the other which had just then come to rest under the influence of Bob's bold action.

Flinging open the door he looked eagerly within. The next instant he started back, in a surprise that was mixed with terror.

"Marie Ormiston!" he gasped.

His eyes had fallen on the form of that false woman, who sat there, with fixed lips and a face pale as death, her eyes glaring into his face with an unconcealed terror and despair. Half reclining beside her was the figure of Grace Garland, dead or insensible, for her eyes were closed, her face colorless, her lips bloodless.

"Marie Ormiston!" he repeated. "Oh, my God! can it be? Is this my disenchantment?"

The next moment, with a sudden revulsion of feeling he flung himself half inside the carriage, grasped the prostrate form in his arms, and dragged her hastily out into the street.

And none too soon, for the next instant, the carriage darted onward with a quick whirl, while the sharp whistle of a whip-lash cutting through the air, was heard.

For Rusty Mike had followed his shot at the daring boy by a quick leap down from the high seat of the carriage. Catching the reins, which lay upon the horses' backs he as quickly regained his seat, just as

Delorme drew the insensible form of his betrothed from the carriage.

A fierce application of the whip followed. The frightened horses leaped upward, tearing themselves from the boy's grasp, and throwing him prostrate between them. Off they went like a shot, the whip being plied with merciless vigor, while the villains stooped to avoid possible bullets.

"But we have got Grace," said George looking with loving eyes into her pale face.

"Is she alive?" asked the frightened father.

"Yes; it is only a faint. She is all right."

"So am I," echoed Bob, picking himself up from the hard pavement, and feeling his limbs for broken bones.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FINAL RESULT.

WITHIN the humble domicile of the Rockett family sat the irate father of the household, his lips set with gloomy determination, the leather strap firmly grasped in his hand. For he had just learned of his son's behavior at the factory, and was waiting for a chance to express his opinion of such conduct.

"The ungrateful reprobate! And after all my sacrifices to bring him up decent, who'd ever thought he'd 'a' treated me this way?" and he wiped his red eyes with the back of his hand, and applied for comfort to a black bottle that sat beside him. "I'll sartainly have to chastise him."

"Oh, but Jacob—" began his wife, in her whining tone.

"Now you just shut up, woman. It's you that's ruined the boy. Arter all my efforts and sacrifices, too. It's rarely discouraging."

At this moment the door opened and Bob entered, his hat set in a jaunty manner on the side of his head, a look of satisfaction on his face, which speedily vanished when he perceived the preparations for a domestic scene.

"What's up now, dad?" he asked querulously.

"Don't be lyin', boy. I know all about your desp'rare ungratefulness. Don't be lyin', I say, or I'll scorch you tenfold worse."

He seemed working himself into a fury on the strength of some metaphorical lie, which Bob had no recollection of having uttered.

"Take off that coat," he gloomily ordered, wetting his lips from the black bottle.

"Now look here, dad," expostulated Bob. "Ain't that played out? I s'pose it's my wages yer arter?"

"This household can't be run without them there wages," was the gloomy response.

"They're here, then," and the boy flung a handful of bank-notes on the table. "Ther's more ways of makin' money 'cept rivet-scrapin', and I'm goin' to back squar' down from that bizness. I'm a capitalist, Dad Rockett."

The father's bleared eyes were fixed with a sort of fascination on the money. He stretched his hand with an involuntary motion toward it.

"I hope it was come by honestly," he muttered. "I hope my son ain't took to stealing."

"Set down and I'll tell you all 'bout it," answered Bob, with a look of importance, as he flung his cap to one side, and seated himself easily on the corner of a chair.

But we have no need to go over his version of the story, of which the reader is already aware. In fact, although we may return hereafter to the story of the after life of the personages whom we have followed through these pages, we must for the present part company with them, with some concluding words.

As to what became of all our personages is not to be easily settled. During the occupation of the lover and father with Grace, who showed signs of a return to consciousness, the villains escaped.

Some policemen came up after a few minutes attracted by the pistol-shots, and gave pursuit in Mr. Delorme's carriage, at his request. But it was in vain. The fugitives had either escaped from the city, or concealed themselves somewhere within its wide limits. Wherever it was they had vanished from pursuit, all efforts to find either the baser villains, or the wealthy and polished lady fiend who had sought the murder of her friend, were in vain. The city had swallowed them from sight.

But George Delorme, his eyes opened to the peril he had escaped from the charms of the siren to whom he had half yielded himself, was full of joy at his disenchantment, and of happiness in the love of the dear girl who had been so fortunately recovered.

A month afterward a marriage took place which made him the happiest man in the world. Or at least he declared so, and it is very likely that he thought so. As for Grace, she looked her happiness, which was certainly not less than his.

Among the many guests at this wedding we must not forget our friends, Mrs. Essex and her son Paul, who were installed among the dearest of Grace's friends. Paul particularly she took as her especial protege, and was determined that he should have every opportunity to make a man of himself.

In regard to the Rockett family it was of more intractable material. Grateful as they all felt to Bob Rockett, it was not so easy to determine just what was best to do for him.

He was persuaded to go to school, to which he consented, more under the influence of his father's strap than his own inclinations. Nor did he quite like to oppose the wishes of his new friends, who were providing the family with money for their support, and who promised, as soon as he had made some progress in reading and writing, to give him a good position in Mr. Garland's store.

And so we must leave them for the present, the lovers married, the youthful members of our community advancing in education, and the villainous portion utterly lost from the society which they had ceased to adorn.

The valuable property which Marie Ormiston possessed in her own right, remained in the hands of an agent, whom she had appointed by letter to look after it, though without giving a hint as to her place of concealment.

And time passed on, over this temporary lull in their adventurous lives; on to the period when a new life of storm should succeed this calm.

THE END.

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